Lilith

the independent Jewish women's magazine

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What We're Just Finding Out about Strong Hasidic Girls

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There's an old story about King Solomon's beautiful daughter who was sent to a high tower in the sea. The King had read in the stars that his daughter would marry a poor man. Not wanting this, the King hid her.

Beshert...

It was meant to be.

While the daughter was locke away, a poor man without shelter, shoes, or food was wandering and came upon a dead ox. That night he took shelter under the ox. As he slept, a great bird carried the ox and the man to the princess's tower.

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Seeing that the marriage was meant to be, King Solomon blessed his daughter and her husband. *Beshert* is the Yiddish word that expresses this blessing of true love and how soul mates are meant to be together.

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Lilith

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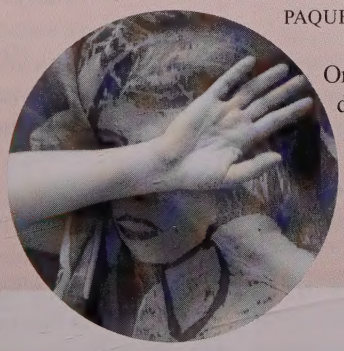

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Why is this magazine called Lilith?

In the Garden of Eden, long before the eating of the apple, the Holy One created the first human beings—a man, Adam, and a woman, Lilith. Lilith said "We are equal because we are created from the same earth."

—FROM THE ALPHABET OF BEN SIRA, 23A-B

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From the Editor

For my 1989 book *Intermarriage: The Challenge of Living with Differences Between Christians and Jews*, I spoke to hundreds of partners in interfaith marriages. These interviews cast light on some gender differences—both obvious and more subtle—which still seem to play out today. Three first-person articles in this issue begin an updated look at women dealing, one way or another, with these relationships. Women and men reacted differently to many of the situations interfaith couples face. What's more, there were additional differences I saw when the Jewish partner was the woman. In marital choices, as in so much else in life, a gender lens refracts a score of other issues. Among them: Jewish women are less likely than Jewish men to want to marry non-Jews. Fewer women intermarry than men do, which means more Jewish women than Jewish men remain single.

Jewish women married to Christians were often blamed for not ensuring that their children would be raised Jewish, while Jewish men seemed to get off without opprobrium if the kids chose not to identify as Jews.

And interfaith couples where the Jewish partner is female may experience a very different dynamic from couples where the *man* is the Jew. It is difficult for many Jews to say what matters to them about being Jewish. For many, Jewish identity doesn't include a credo, so defining what it means to be Jewish can be very challenging. But because women are permitted to tune in to their intuition more than men, non-Jewish wives say they pick up on signals from their partners that aren't explicitly articulated—like why it matters to a Jewish husband that his children be raised as Jews, or at least with a sense of their Jewishness, even though he may say that attending services isn't important to him, or that Jewish rituals and celebrations don't matter. In other words, Jewish men are lucky to be married to women.

Jewish men are lucky to be married to women.

Fourteen years ago, the Jewish world was rocked by the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey that revealed about half of all Jews getting married were marrying non-Jews. Much of the quantitative data buttressed what I had observed from the couples I'd interviewed for *Intermarriage*. Now, with the September 2003 release of a 2000-01 survey of American Jews, we have evidence that, though Jewish women are still less likely to ever get married than other American women, the percentage of Jews marrying non-Jews has increased only slightly since the 1980s. Perhaps the new survey data will allay some of the collective number-panic pervading the Jewish world for the last decade, and we can tune in, past the static, to hear about the emotions and experiences—the human stories behind the statistics—of Jews in interfaith families.

In Lilith's pages in this issue, a feature entitled "Halves" explores the Jewish identities of three women in their 20s, women on the edge in different ways.

• A woman who always considered herself a Jew gets the news one night from her Orthodox rabbi that she's not. She tells why she, her mother, and her identical twin sister react differently to this unwelcome news.

• Another author is the adult child of a nominally Jewish father and a "recovering Catholic" mother. She calls herself a "Half-Jew," and reports a new identity category for the 66 percent of the children of intermarried parents *not* being raised to name themselves "Jew." She gives us a preview of how her cohort will choose their own partners.

• A third twentysomething woman checking in with us is the Jewish half of an interfaith marriage. She explores what it feels like to shift the locus of power in her extended family. For the first time in generations—maybe ever—the Jewish expert is female.

These three strongly worded stories bring us into realities barely hinted at by the survey data. And they represent, I think, a new kind of writing that we're seeing more and more frequently at Lilith. While a few years ago the topic explored most often by Jewish women was the history of our foremothers—sometimes scholarly, sometimes sentimental, always heartfelt—the magazine now is a also magnet for first-person articles which combine powerful narration with an analysis of what life experiences of this moment can teach us.

* * *

Had she not been murdered, Anne Frank would be turning 75 in a few months. With Lilith's Anne Frank section in this issue we look back not just to Anne's era but also to the teen years of women who have come of age in the years since. We turned to readers from all over the world—South Africa, Israel, Europe, the FSU and North America— to see if we could understand more fully the powerful hold this book has on so many Jewish women writers and thinkers.

I was focused on *The Diary of Anne Frank* when, coincidentally, a reporter called me the other day to ask what Jewish book had most affected me. Without pausing to ask her what she meant exactly by a "Jewish" book, I answered, quite spontaneously, "*Marjorie Morningstar*." And then I had to ask

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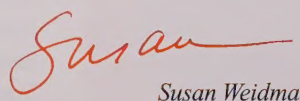
myself: "Why *that* book?" Answering the question (for myself and for her), I realized that Herman Wouk's *Marjorie Morningstar* represents to me not great literature, but rather a benchmark for how Jewish women were perceived and portrayed by a male writer of influence, and thus how we were forced to see ourselves in an era that seems far removed from the nastiness and venality in later literary renditions of the Jewish American Princess.

Marjorie, apple of her family's collective eye, transgresses in thought and deed (aspirations to a career in the theater and a pre-marital affair, as it was quaintly called in the 50s), but in the end she makes conventional choices. The book and the hugely popular film which followed remain for me like a set of stone tablets on which the world carved the limits set forth for an intelligent and hopeful Jewish daughter. Interestingly, though *Marjorie* appeared at almost the same time as *The Diary*, the images of young women partisans in the forests and teen-aged resistance heroines in the ghettos were not yet embedded in the consciousness most North American Jews. So *Marjorie Morningstar* is for me a punctuation mark. It's the end of an era, a pause coming before the works spoken and written in the voices of Jewish women themselves, penning (or typing) their own narratives, in the 1960s and after.

Amplifying the stories Jewish women tell in their own strong voices continues to be a prime reason why Lilith exists. It's also why I hope you will want to make a generous tax-deductible contribution (see Lilith's address and phone numbers to your left) to help sustain this unique magazine in its mission.



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Kol Ishah:

The Voices of Women.

Traditionally, the **voice** of the Jewish woman was **not to be heard** in public, lest it arouse men. **No more.** These pages are for news about Jewish women, **in our own strong voices.**

Brava to:

Newsday, the Long Island-based newspaper, for running a three-part series on rabbinic sexual abuse this May. The paper decided to cover the story after receiving a number of calls about rabbis—and leaders in just about every religion—in response to their coverage of the scandals involving Catholic priests. Reporter **Stephanie Saul,** who covered both the priest and rabbi abuse stories, said that many rabbis she spoke with, both before and after the stories appeared, said that they were grateful for Newsday's coverage.

Saul, who is not Jewish, told LILITH: "I think the rabbis were more cooperative than the Catholic bishops."

Out of the Closet and into the Spotlight

They were two married Jewish housewives who met at Concello Towers, a middle-income high rise co-op in Brooklyn in 1958. They babysat each other's kids (they had five between them). Every Friday night, after attending synagogue services, they sat together at the kitchen table over a bottle of wine and talked about what needed to be done in the community. They organized marches on City Hall to get a junior high school in their neighborhood, to get a traffic light on Cropsey Avenue. They were also active in ORT and American Jewish Congress.

And then, in the mid-1970s, they fell in love.

The story of **Ruthie Berman** and **Connie Kurtz** has now become a documentary, *Ruthie & Connie: Every Room in the House,* which has been making the rounds of film festivals for the last year and a half. In June 2003, the film premiered on cable television.

It's a love story, and more. The activism that first drew these two women together as friends continued to ignite them as lovers and partners. In 1988, they and two other couples sued the New York City Board of Education—Ruthie worked in the city school system for 25 years as a guidance counselor—for domestic partner benefits. During this time the two women went public, appearing on Geraldo and Donahue. (In the film, a clip from Donahue has Ruthie shouting, "No, I will not shut up!") They won far more than the battle; as a result of their lawsuit, a domestic partner registry was established for all New York City employees. Today the two are still highly visible participants in the struggle for gay and other civil rights. Says Connie: "We are making demands as women, as older women, and as Jews."

But their journey has been as tough as you can imagine for, as Ruthie names them, two lesbians in cooperative housing with a predominantly Jewish population.

"For me, the most difficult thing was accepting that I was a lesbian. At that time, I thought it was a terrible thing," Ruthie says, referring to the time when she and Connie fell in love. "I had to make a decision, to leave everything and go into a whole new world. I feared rejection by my family, my colleagues, and the world."

"My happiness was a priority that I finally hooked into," Connie says. Their children were teenagers when the two became a couple. That the women had to choose between two worlds—in Connie's words, "we could not live in both"—is one of the most riveting aspects of their story. When they divorced, Ruthie and her husband worked out mutual custody of their children. Connie's husband and children went back to Israel, where the family had lived for four years. The two women took an apartment in Brooklyn near Ruthie's family, so that she would be as available as possible to them.

But it has not been easy. One of Ruthie's sons has not spoken to her for many years. In the film, Ruthie tearfully quotes him as saying that he loves her because she's his mother, but she's also a lesbian, and he doesn't like her.

But that she and Connie, Jewish mothers and grandmothers, are together, says Ruthie, was *bashert.*

— ALICE SPARBERG ALEXIOU

Ruthie & Connie: Every Room in the House, 2002, 60 minutes.
For more information: www.ruthieandconnie.com.

Women Objectors to Military Service in Israel

Men who refuse military service for ideological reasons frequently make headline news in Israel. Yet young women in Israel today who choose this difficult, unpopular course often find themselves virtually invisible.

The army is reticent to discuss the phenomenon—it declined a request to be interviewed for this article— and statistics are scarce. However, women comprised half of the 300 high school seniors who published a widely publicized open letter in 2001 opposing induction. Maariv newspaper reported that the army issued 114 exemptions to women in 2001 and 141 in 2002.

The State of Israel drafts both men and women into compulsory military service. However, The Defense Service Law provides that "A female person of military age who has proved….that reasons of conscience…prevent her from serving in the defense service shall be exempt from the duty of that service."

An applicant is required to bring two witnesses to the hearing to vouch for the sincerity of the beliefs to which she testifies and has the right to appeal a negative decision of the board, popularly known as the "conscience committee." Once exempted, she has the option, but not the duty, to perform alternative service, most often involving work in schools, hospitals, or social organizations.

RONNIE BARKAN

Danya Vaknin and Noa Kaufman.

The experience of appearing before the closed committee is not an easy one. And women who decide to object also face their classmates' approbation. **Danya Vaknin** of Mevaseret Zion feels that "[a]t times it seems like it would have been easier to enlist. The price of resistance is high. I've lost most of my friends."

Parents are often afraid of repercussions down the line upon their daughters in a society where proof of army service is a standard question on employment and university admission forms, and not having served raises eyebrows. Conscientious objector **Moran Farhan** reports: "I even got a threat that I would be fired from my job. Sometimes it feels like I shouldn't talk about it, so people won't hate me." **Noa Freudenthal** was told as a conscientious objector it would be a waste of time to apply to the Hebrew University School of Medicine. She now studies medicine in Germany.

As women objectors rarely go to jail, they do not become celebrities among the left, as do the men who refuse induction. "Because of the general sexist infrastructure within the military, being a woman CO becomes publicly unimportant. These young women doing something quite difficult are completely marginalized, " says **Rela Mazali,** a founder of the New Profile movement aimed at demilitarizing Israeli society.

For example, **Shani Werner,** a 2003 high school graduate, feels her decision made her "an outsider" among her classmates. When Werner told her mother she planned to resist because she was a feminist, her mother replied, "If you're a feminist, go be a fighter pilot." She reports her family would have preferred her to "do what everyone does." Werner recalls when she signed the draft resisters' letter "[w]e were so convinced that women's draft resistance is identical in importance to men's." But a year and a half later she felt disillusioned: "The women's draft resistance movement…no longer exists. We're no more than a team of cheerleaders. Accompanying the boys as they go into and out of prison, formulating petitions and letters, demonstrating, visiting the prisoners…. Do I have no choice other than being someone's 'little woman'—if not the military hero's, then the resister hero's?"

—HELEN SCHARY MOTRO

kol ishah

And a big hug to...

...all the Jewish women who made possible the exuberant musical Hairspray, which netted eight Tonys. Producer **Margo Lion,** a woman in an overwhelmingly male world, whose credits include Angels in America and Elaine Stritch at Liberty, had the vision to take this John Waters cult film to Broadway. The diminutive **Marissa Jaret Winokur** (below left), who won for best actress, did her part in combating young girls' negative feelings about their bodies, when she said in her acceptance

PAUL KOLNIK

speech: "If a 4-foot-11 chubby New York girl can be a leading lady in a Broadway show and win a Tony, then anything is possible." And finally, the great **Harvey Fierstein** (right), the actor and writer, who won his fourth Tony, his second for best actor—for playing Edna Turnblad, the loving mother of Tracy, Winokur's character. Being a mother came naturally to Fierstein. "At rehearsal, I mothered the cast," Fierstein told Playbill magazine. "Oscar Wilde quipped, 'A woman's tragedy is that she becomes her mother. A man's is that he doesn't.' I set out to disprove that destiny."

No Comment

A store in New York's Greenwich Village features a sale on Donna Karan undershirts described in a window sign as "wife-beaters," thus managing to hideously combine sexism with class prejudice.

Lilith Notes the Passing of:

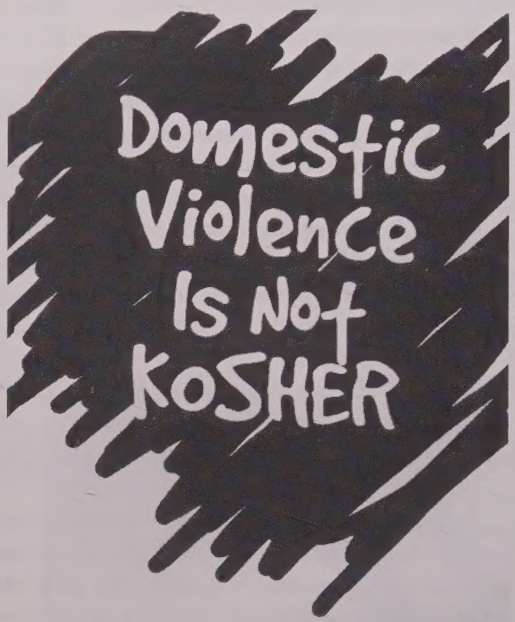
Selma Koch, 95, bra maven and owner of the Town Shop, a tiny lingerie store on Manhattan's Upper West Side. Koch held sway behind the counter seven days a week until her death this May, and helped you find exactly the undergarment you needed. Koch, who appeared on radio and television spots, could tell you your bra size just by looking.

Wife-Beaters

More than 400 people, drawn from every continent except Antarctica, came to Baltimore this past July for the first-ever conference focusing exclusively on domestic violence in the Jewish community.

At the opening plenary, **Dr. Amy Robbins Ellison** recounted the tale of her brutally abusive relationship—the windows her husband smashed her head through, the constant bruises she hid at work—and read a poem her daughter had just sent from camp about abuse seen through the eyes of a child. Listeners wept openly at her testimony. Two elderly women turned to offer tissues to the man crying in the seat behind me.

During workshops at the three-day conference, organized by Jewish Women International, participants talked about efforts to involve boys and men in the campaign to end domestic violence. **Jonathan Stillerman,** co-director of Men Can Stop Rape in Washington, D.C., seeks out males 12-21 to work with women to end men's violence. He tries to teach boys more appropriate ways to show that they are men. As a Jewish male himself, Stillerman says "Jewish boys are specific. *Mensch* is a strong part of masculinity in the Jewish community, whereas many other cultures don't have a positive term for those softer male qualities." Yet are Jewish boys in a better place for understanding domestic violence than their peers? Judging from the reports of abuse and the statistics aired at the conference, the notion that "Jewish men don't beat their wives" is a form of communal denial.



FROM A T-SHIRT DISTRIBUTED AT THE CONFERENCE.

Another veiled-in-secrecy topic that conference participants tried to open up was incest. As the campaign to end abuse and violence charges forward, is the sensitive issue of incest left behind in the shuffle? Some incest survivors thought so, as they narrated their stories and challenged Jewish organizations for their lack of attention to this issue. Incest occurs at the same rate in Jewish families as in other families, yet is rarely discussed.

In the workshop "Men Who Batter: Addressing the Issue Though Community Change," Orthodox social worker **Lisa Twerski** of New York's Shalom Taskforce explained that the Orthodox are creating their own women's support services. It often feels, she suggested, that non-Orthodox organizations are trying to "correct" Orthodox practices, and this "feels like an attack."

In a surprising twist, **Phyllis Frank,** head of rehabilitation programs for batterers in Rockland County, NY, vowed that if she could she would close down every remedial program directed at the batterers themselves. Her reasoning? They don't work. Instead, they extend the tolerance a women has for staying with a man. Frank tells women, "Make your plans based on the man you know you have, not on the man you hope he becomes."

The conference was a matrix for new ideas and emerging programs led by experts in the field, including **Marcia Cohn Spiegel** and **Laura Davis,** empowered survivors, and their supporters.

—ILANA KRAMER

Golda's Balcony

AARON EPSTEIN

After opening runs in Lenox, Massachusetts and Boston, and four sold-out months Off Broadway, "Golda's Balcony," the play about **Golda Meir's** life, has found a Broadway home. The New York version stars powerhouse **Tovah Feldshuh,** who fills that large space just as well as she did the smaller one, which seemed barely able to contain her. The play began its life in 1977 on Broadway as an unsuccessful ensemble piece starring **Anne Bancroft,** but playwright **William Gibson** has rendered it down to its most essential element: Golda herself. The rest of the cast—**Moshe Dayan, David Ben-Gurion, Shimon Peres, Anwar Sadat** and the rest of the men Golda worked with and against as prime minister—are conjured up by shifts in Feldshuh's accent and in photographs projected onto the walls of her shabby room. Feldshuh's imitation of **Henry Kissinger** is reason enough to buy tickets.

As the play races from one end of Golda's roller-coaster life to the other, we hurtle along with it, thanks to Feldshuh's inspired performance. First in a bathrobe and then a dowdy suit, near death and still chain smoking, Golda takes us from her Wisconsin girlhood to a heartbreaking scene in which she convinces Holocaust survivors interned on Cyprus to send their children to Israel ahead of them. The play reaches its climax when Feldshuh re-enacts Golda's angst over whether to authorize the use of nuclear weapons during the 1973 Yom Kippur War against Syria and Egypt. (The bombs were built underground in a secret location called "Golda's Balcony.") It's hard not to wonder, knowing how much the Sate of Israel meant to her, if Golda was as tortured as the script requires. When she ultimately saves Israel by threatening to use the weapons unless the United States gives her another way to defend her outnumbered, overpowered country, it's clear how far Golda was willing to go for her truest love.

—MICHELLE FALKENSTEIN

National Young Women's Day of Action

Take note: October 23, 2003 is the National Young Women's Day of Action. Watch for teach-ins and demonstrations on domestic violence, sex education, and reproductive rights planned for college campuses all over the country.

"We nurture activism," said **Marlene Fried,** director of the Civil Liberties and Public Policy program (CLPP) at Hampshire College in Massachusetts, which instituted the Day of Action 11 years ago, in memory of **Rosie Jimenez,** the first woman to die as a result of the Hyde Amendment, which cut off abortion funding by Medicaid. Every year CLPP suggests a different theme; this year's is voting and voter registration.

Ryn Gluckman, coordinator of the Day of Action, disagrees with the now-common perception that young women today are more conservative than their mothers, and don't support the right to choose. [But see sidebar.] "I think young people today are at the forefront of every movement for social justice," said Gluckman, 25, a recent Hampshire graduate. "I think the conservative image is framed by the conservative media." —A.S.A.

For more information about the National Young Women's Day of Action: www.clpp.hampshire.edu.

kol ishah

Young Women and Choice

"Recently, I attended a program on Long Island to inform the public about the growing threat to women's reproductive rights," writes **Carly Lipkowitz,** a Binghamton University student, in an e-mail to LILITH. "As an 18-year-old female and advocate for women's autonomy over their own bodies, I felt that it was imperative for me to be there. However, to my dismay, I saw that many of the women who were in attendance were past menopause. Besides me, there were only two other young women in the audience. I felt great disappointment in my own generation. Should not more of them have been in attendance? Do they not realize that *Roe v. Wade*, which entitles every woman to a safe and legal abortion, is in serious danger of being overturned?

"I think that most of my generation do not associate a coat hanger with an illegal abortion. This grotesque image is not a familiar sight to them. But if we do not become active, it could be! So if you are pro-choice but passive, go online and sign up with an organization—NARAL, Planned Parenthood, etc.—so that your voice can be heard."

Walk On

Vikki Knafo, a single mother in Israel, walked 124 miles in one week in July to protest cuts in the national budget that have hit women, especially single mothers, very hard. Dozens of single mothers followed her example, marching to Jerusalem from all over Israel. "The Single Mothers," as the grass-roots movement is now called, has drawn the attention of the Israeli and Jewish-American media. The cuts represent a drastic change in Israeli policy, which had been formulated to encourage women to have children since the founding of the state in 1948. But in the current budget crisis, government subsidies to single parents have been slashed by more than 25 percent.

No Joke

"I'm a feminist. I believe in a woman's right to choose her own jewelry." This was one of the jokes cracked by Orthodox Jew **Joan Weiner,** the first woman to win the New York Jewish Week's annual Jewish Comic of the Year contest.

Follow the Money

When a Harvard Divinity School student discovered last fall that the School had accepted a $2.5 million gift from an Arab leader whose name graces a think tank spewing anti-Semitic propaganda, she decided to find out more.

What **Rachel Fish** found in December 2002 horrified her. The Abu Dhabi-based Zayed International Center for Coordination and Follow-up was founded, according to its website, "in fulfillment of the vision of His Highness **Sheik Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan,**" President of the United Arab Emirates. The center's executive director has called Jews "the enemies of all nations," according to a 2002 story in the Los Angeles Times, and has published material containing other offensive references.

With some of her classmates, Fish, 23, met in March 2003 with Divinity School Dean William Graham, to request that the university return the Sheik's gift. They also founded Students for an Ethical Divinity School, complete with a website and petition calling on Harvard to reject the sheik's money. When the dean extended his hand for Fish to shake at graduation in May—Fish received a master's degree in contemporary thought in Judaism and Islam—she handed him a 130-page bound copy of her research on the Zayed Center. With it she included a copy of the petition, and a letter asking him to denounce anti-Semitism in the Arab world. Fish also delivered copies to the office of Harvard president **Lawrence Summers.** In May, the story hit the national media.

Dean Graham, who in May 2002 had signed a petition demanding that Harvard divest from Israel, did not respond to Fish's letter. In mid-May, Harvard issued a statement that they were "carefully investigating the matter." At press time, a Harvard spokesperson told LILITH that she does not know whether the Zayed gift, which is to fund a chair in Islamic studies, will be returned.

"It's now at the university level," said **Wendy McDowell,** a Divinity School spokeswoman. "It's being decided by Harvard's president, not really by Dean Graham. And there is no time line."

Fish says that "raising my head and protesting" is nothing new. She grew up in Johnson City, Tennessee, where hers was one of only 60 Jewish families in the whole region. When she and her brother were sent out to the hall during prayers at school, she says, her parents spoke up. Thanks to the Fish family, the school district now forbids school prayer.

"When I talked to the Harvard Divinity School administration and faculty, I said that I knew the school was the first to address issues of race, gender, and sexuality," said Fish. She was referring to the Divinity School's longtime reputation for sensitivity. "I don't understand why the school has remained silent on the issue of religious intolerance." Harvard Divinity School has been actively seeking Jewish female donors and lecturers for the past few years.

In June, Fish wrote a story for the Wall Street Journal about the Divinity School controversy. When it appeared, some protested that her account was misguided. But when asked to comment specifically about the details, no official at Harvard would speak on the record.

NOTE: As LILITH was going to press, we learned that the UAE has just closed down the Zayed Center.

—A.S.A

To contact Students for an Ethical Divinity School: www.moralitynotmoney.com.

Mayor? No Job for a Lady, Says Mom

When **Meyera Oberndorf** was a girl growing up in Newport News, Virginia, her mother thought that a woman going into politics wasn't feminine. "When I initially told her I was thinking about running for public office she told me to bite my tongue," said Oberndorf, 62, now the mayor of Virginia Beach. "She said that the women who went into politics were not her idea of what a lady should be. I always wanted her approval, so if she had lived I probably would never have run."

Fortunately, she did. Oberndorf has served four consecutive terms as mayor of the largest city in Virginia. She is the first woman—and the first Jew—to hold that position, and she was elected with no party affiliation. Among her accomplishments: securing the city its own water supply, and dealing with civil unrest in the late 1980s. For her work with the city of nearly 500,000, Oberndorf was cited by Newsweek as one of the 25 most dynamic mayors in America. Her 15-year stint as mayor is the culmination of a career spent in public service that began when a group of women in her neighborhood began to complain about the local school. Then only 22 and a new bride, Oberndorf took it upon herself to invite school officials to her home along with all the "ladies" in the neighborhood to discuss their concerns. Ever a Southerner, Oberndorf's mother helped her prepare for the meeting by bringing over all of her best silver.

The silver was impressive, but when the school board and the ladies gathered, Oberndorf was stunned that not one of the women who had been so vocal in their complaints to her as a neighbor would dare speak out in front of all the men. So the future mayor opened her mouth to speak up for the needs of others. She hasn't shut it since.

Oberndorf served in a number of appointed and elected positions before she ran for mayor. "When I decided to run I was told, mostly by men, that there were three reasons I would never win," Oberndorf recalled. "First, I was a woman; second, I was Jewish; and third, I was short." Since she knew there was no hiding the fact that she was female, she decided to be equally open about being a Jew.

At community functions during her run for office, she was direct. "I would get up and say, 'I'm here to discuss my visions and concerns for this city and see what we have in common. If you would like to discuss any personal issues with me, such as my religion—which is Judaism—I will be happy to talk to you afterwards,'" said Oberndorf. As for the issue of her height, the 5'1" mayor said her solution is simple: "I make sure to get my campaign pictures taken from the shoulders up."

"I am conscious that I'm the first woman to hold this job and the first Jew," admits Oberndorf. "I try to be as careful as possible because I want to make sure I don't make any mistakes that could be pinned on the next woman or Jew to hold this office."

"Meyera"—her name is pronounced My-YAIR-ah—"is the most popular person ever to hold the position of mayor," said Dennis Hartig, an editor at the Virginian Pilot. "Everyone calls her Meyera, and it's a pretty big city to have a first-name relationship with. She's pretty charming, and she rose to popularity in part because she insists on very high ethical standards. She would show up for baby showers if you invited her. Her personal touch has really won people over."

"I am very accessible," she confirms. "I drive myself everywhere and people always wave to me from their cars and come up and talk to me when I'm at the market. I love it. For someone who grew up as an only child, it makes me feel like I have a huge family."

In fact, Oberndorf is a grandmother. She has been married for over 40 years, and is the mother of two daughters.

Oberndorf's career in city hall has not been without controversy. Her critics have portrayed her as the archetypal "Jewish mother" in editorial cartoons. One cartoon depicted her in a kitchen, saying she should stay there, be a good Jewish mother and make matzoh ball soup. "That ticked me off," she said. "I thought, boy, you said the wrong thing to me. Now I want to stay in office even more!"

—RUTH ANDREW ELLENSON

LILITH, Censored

Artist **Anna Oneglia** created the painting on LILITH's current cover for an exhibit on myths by the Anchorage Museum of Art and History in Alaska. But after Oneglia completed the commissioned work, the museum refused to display it. The reason, the curator told her, was that the Lilith stories contained material unsuitable for a young audience. According to Oneglia, the curator also said that the museum director became incensed at the mere reference to Lilith. *First Woman (Lilith)* is now on display at the San Francisco Arts Commission Galleries.

THINK TANK

Jewish Women and Reproductive Rights in the 21st Century

RABBI BALFOUR BRICKNER

Survey after survey reveals that the vast majority of Jewish women are pro-choice. Biblical and rabbinic Judaism sanction abortion, especially when the life of the woman is threatened physically or mentally; do not equate abortion with murder (*Exodus 21*); and do not consider a fetus as a person (*Mishnah Ohalot 8:7*). Judaism also endorses the use of mechanical contraceptives; even in the earliest historical periods, Jewish women used contraceptive sponges called *mokh*.

To the question of how many children a couple are expected to have in order to fulfill the Biblical command to "Be fruitful and multiply," the rabbinical answer was, "Two": a male and a female. And if the couple produced two of the same sex, the obligation was fulfilled after the birth of the third child. From then on, a couple was free from further childbearing, though that did not always happen.

Clearly, Judaism supports the pro-choice agenda. If some Jews do not, it may be for reasons sociological rather than theological. There are Jews who feel they have an obligation to have large families to counteract the effects of the Holocaust.

Today, the pro-choice option is in danger of being silenced by the White House and a Republican-dominated Congress. The current president's first official act upon assuming office was to resurrect the "gag rule" which barred healthcare providers who were receiving American family planning assistance from counseling women about abortion, and of course prohibited them from providing any abortion services, even with their own money. That single act cost the Planned Parenthood Federation of America International an estimated $17 million, and may result in up to a million and a half unwanted pregnancies, mostly to poor women in third world countries.

Women's rights to reproductive health and freedom are under siege, threatened here and abroad by a massive charge from America's "right brigade." The present administration and its cohorts in Congress use every conceivable device—executive orders, regulations, legal briefs, legislative measures, and key appointments to limit reproductive rights. All reveal a pattern of "assault and destroy":

- The constitutional guarantee to abortion is literally a heartbeat away from being overturned. The death or resignation of one Supreme Court justice could mean the end of *Roe v Wade*.
- The President shows a clear and insidious pattern of trying to pack the federal judiciary with anti-choice appointees.
- Attorney General John Ashcroft supports a congressional action called the Abortion Non-Discrimination Act, which would allow government-supported healthcare providers in the U.S. to decline to include abortion in their reproductive health services. Under this act, hospitals and HMOs could even forbid their doctors from mentioning to their female patients that abortion is a legal option.
- This administration has declared war on sex education. "Abstinence Only" programs, now in 35% of the nation's public schools, are costing $50 million in tax dollars. Scientifically accurate information about contraception and abortion has disappeared from all government websites. Much of the curricula for these programs is written by members of anti-choice religious bodies such as First Resort. They describe abortion as "killing a baby" and students are told that such medical actions "tear off their arms and legs."
- Federal financing for research on all new embryonic stem cell lines has been prohibited. President Bush considers such research immoral because, in his view, human embryos are destroyed when the cells are extracted. There is no clear scientific evidence to support that belief. What is clear is the loss of research capacity that could lead to breakthroughs in treatments for diseases like Parkinson's, cancer, diabetes, and spinal cord injuries.
- This same thought seems to motivate Tommy Thompson, Secretary for Health and Human Services to make "unborn children" rather than pregnant women eligible for coverage under the Children's Health Insurance program. This is one of the cleverest and foulest tricks ever perpetrated on the American public. By seeking to extend care to an unborn child, the government illegally grants a fetus the same status it would grant to a born child.

Lest anyone think this proposed act is part of some benevolent concern for children, examine this administration's current budget proposals:

An analysis of the House of Representative's budget by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities found that the administration's proposed cuts in child nutrition programs threaten to eliminate school lunches for 2.4 million low-income children. The cut in Medicaid would lead to the elimination of health coverage for 13.6 million children, mostly from poor families.

The cut in the food stamp program would lead to a reduction in the average benefit from an already lean 91 cents per meal to 84 cents. Cuts in budget will negatively and seriously affect children of the poorest sector of our society.

As if all this is not sufficiently outlandish, this administration now seeks to elevate the status of a fetus or even a fertilized egg to that of a person with rights equal to, or perhaps exceeding, those of a born woman. This is theologically appalling. The proposed action is even more reprehensible coming from politicians, many of whom make a fetish out of their alleged devotion to "Christian religious values" and frequently make public expressions of their Christian piety. The equation of fetus with child reveals both their ignorance and their dismissal of religious law.

The Hebrew Bible deals explicitly with this subject:

> *If men strive together and wound a pregnant woman so that her fruit be expelled, but no harm befall her, then shall he be fined as her husband shall assess, and the matter placed before the judges...*
>
> *—Exodus 21.22*

Jewish Biblical commentators have repeatedly examined the ramifications of this text and in every instance come to legal conclusions based on their conviction that the fetus was not a child. In rabbinic terms, "It is not a living soul." The Mishnah, the first rabbinic commentary on Biblical text, completed during the third century C.E., carries the matter further:

> *A woman who is having difficulty giving birth, it is permitted to cut up the fetus inside her womb and take it out limb by limb because her life takes precedence...*
>
> *—Mishnah Ohalot 7:6*

Reproductive health and freedom are under siege by a charge from America's "right brigade."

In March 2003, Congress enacted legislation banning "partial birth" abortions. The phrase is a deception, but from a public relations angle it is quite clever, designed to attract the sympathetic support of the unknowing. There is no such thing as a "partial birth." A woman either gives birth or she does not. The banned medical procedure is more exactly titled "dilation and extraction," used when an abortion at a late stage is indicated. It is rarely used. Of the million and a half abortions performed annually in the United States, fewer than 1500 of these late-term abortions are done and then only when the fetus threatens the mother's life. Congressional behavior was a transparent charade, played for the radical right.

In a stunning editorial on January 12, 2003, *The New York Times* observed:

> *"Most Americans would be shocked at the lengths American representatives are going to in their international war against women's rights to control their own bodies."*

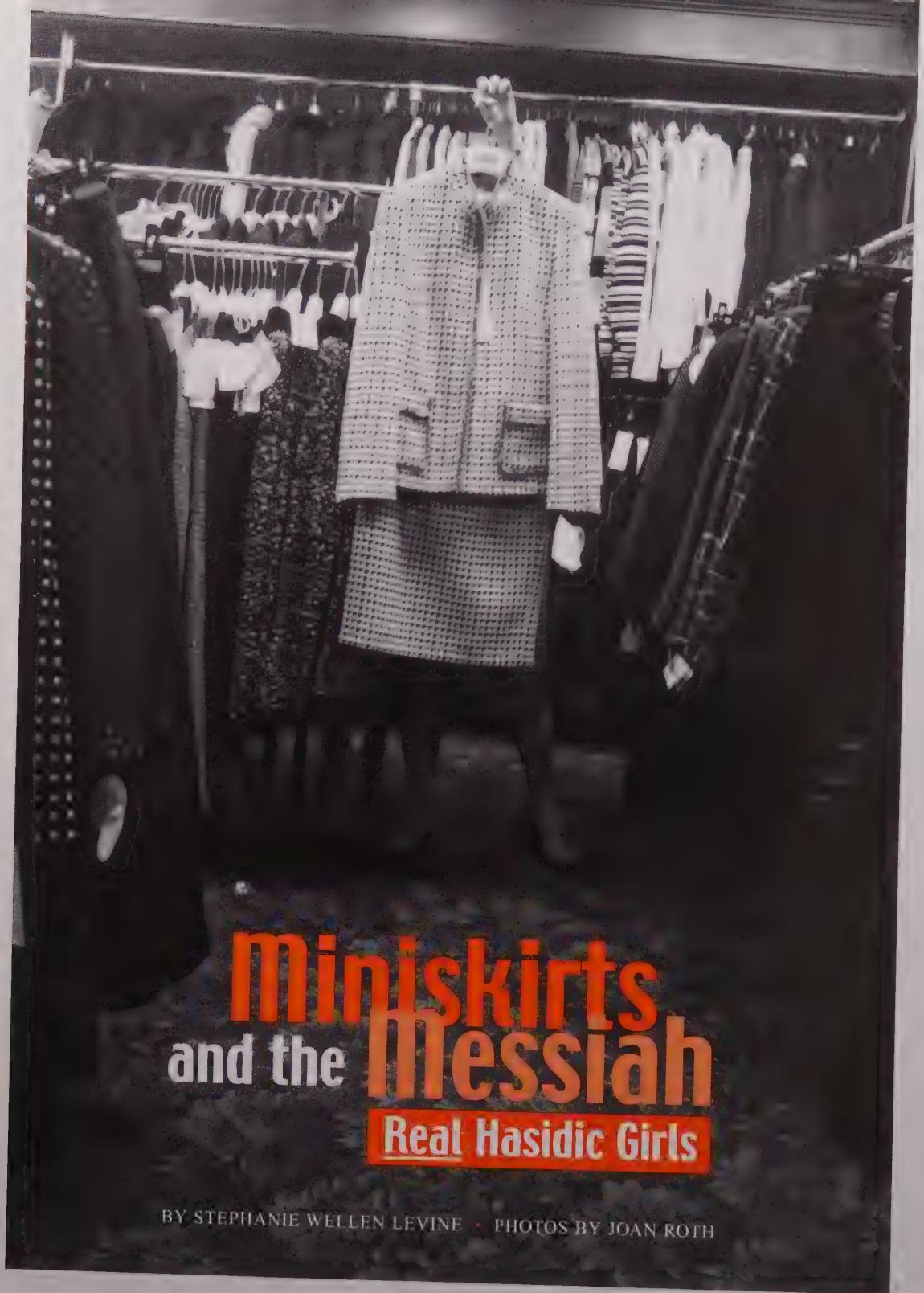
There is simply no avoiding the obvious conclusion. The Republican Party, led by the ideology of its presidential leader, neither believes in nor supports women's health or the rights of women to make decisions about their own reproductive lives. As a civil libertarian, and as a Jew who comes to his support of women's reproductive rights from an understanding of Biblical and rabbinic Judaism, I am appalled by what cruel and thoughtless laws are doing to women here and throughout the world.

Nor do I forget that Dr. Barnett Slepian was murdered by an anti-Semite on a Sabbath eve, October 28, 1998, after returning from the Reform synagogue where he had gone to remember the anniversary of his father's death. Slepian was the fifth obstetrician shot by a gunman who made a ritual of targeting a doctor every autumn in western New York or eastern Canada to mark the November 11 date that some anti-abortion militants call "remembrance day for the unborn." Four of the five victims were Jews. Canadian authorities suspect the fifth was chosen because the shooter thought he was Jewish. Shortly before the doctor's death, Buffalo police received a poster that showed Slepian's face with the words "Jew" and "Killer" scrawled across it.

As disturbing as all of this is, even more frightening is the recent *New York Times* story headline: "Surprise, Mom. I Am Against Abortion." (March 30, 2003.) The story describes a growing conservative trend among teenage and college-age women that contrasts the attitudes of their counterparts a generation earlier. The article speculates on the reasons why pregnancy rates among teenage girls 15-19 have declined 19% between 1990 and 1997, thus making abortion less necessary. Emphasis has shifted from the rights of women to the rights of a fetus, the result of successful propaganda by compulsory-pregnancy groups. Abortion rights are taken for granted. Yet as one young woman observed: "For my generation, we have always grown up knowing we could have an abortion. I look at being pro-choice as being American, to have free will. I would hope that mothers do decide to keep their babies but I just want women to be able to make up their own minds."

The struggle in American society today over reproductive matters is a deadly serious one. Not just reproductive freedom, but freedom itself is at risk, the very soul of this nation. Choice is essentially a spiritual idea that affirms that no one has the right to trespass against my conscience or legislate my governance of my own body. The right of any government arm to proscribe my beliefs is a very narrow one. These are basic, fundamental rights, enshrined in the Constitution and in its First Amendment. It is what makes our society so precariously unique. Fetal politics stake out the battleground on which we must wage that war for preservation of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. ■

BALFOUR BRICKNER is Senior Rabbi Emeritus at the Stephen Wise Free Synagogue in New York. His most recent book is *Finding God in the Garden* (Little, Brown, 2003).



Miniskirts and the Messiah

Real Hasidic Girls

BY STEPHANIE WELLEN LEVINE · PHOTOS BY JOAN ROTH

Stephanie Wellen Levine recently spent a full year living with Hasidic girls in Crown Heights, Brooklyn. She entered female lives rigidly circumscribed both by Jewish law and the social customs of a tightly knit movement; using the methods of Carol Gilligan and other gender experts, she observed their struggles and their strengths. The girls she interviewed, aged 13 to 23 ("in this community all single females are girls," she notes) surprised her with their vibrancy and—despite the strictures—with their originality. Here we meet Malkie Belfer (not her real name), forthright and independent.

Mrs. Belfer looked exhausted. With it all, she seemed content and pleased with the results of her Passover preparations. Tonight's work was her responsibility. Her oldest daughter, Malkie, would help.

Malkie shifted in her seat on the couch, and her knees peeked out from beneath her skirt. It was a holiday, so her skirt was a bit more conservative than usual. Normally, her knees were in full view, regardless of how she sat. To the casual Lubavitch observer, this scene would seem incongruous. Malkie was clearly devout, to the point where she kept her mother in line. She looked naughty, though. It's nothing you or I would notice, but most Lubavitch girls just don't wear snug skirts that leave their knees bare.

While Malkie shared her parents' intense religious belief and craving for the Messianic age, she was a limit-pusher. Her passionately devout *baal teshuvah* parents abhorred the idea of college. They wanted to keep their children completely enmeshed in the Lubavitch system, with no potentially faith-damaging outside influences. But Malkie insisted upon enrolling at Touro, a college whose ultra-Orthodox auspices do not completely erase the taint of secular studies in a non-Lubavitch atmosphere. Like many of her peers, Malkie combined her mornings at the post-high school seminary with evening classes at Touro.

She adored her parents and admired the spiritual fortitude behind their decision to devote their lives to Hasidism shortly after graduating from college, inspired by years of intense friendship with Lubavitch mentors. Yet Malkie craved somewhat different circumstances for her future. "Financial security is very important to me," she told me often, as one prime explanation for her desire for a high-powered career. But the problem goes far beyond money. Stifled by her peers' "narrow view of everything, from their lack of interest in non-Jewish books to their afternoons spent gossiping about Crown Heights, Crown Heights, Crown Heights," she hopes to raise her children away from a Lubavitch enclave.

Malkie had earned financial freedom from her parents; she was footing the entire bill for college and all of her living expenses from her earnings at various jobs, which ranged from a research assistantship at school to an administrative position at a Hasidic-owned jewelry store in Manhattan.

She dreamed of tackling the corporate world, or perhaps landing a tenured professorship, in a culture where both women and men typically lacked lofty career ambitions, seeing jobs as necessary but dreary tasks that should never consume much of a Hasid's central thoughts or passions. She wore her slightly too short skirts with poise. She has also been known to go clubbing in Manhattan, a habit she recently discarded out of disgust that the Orthodox guys at these places took off their yarmulkes: "That just did it for me. They're *frum* [religious] guys. Why should they want to hide that?" Malkie was a rebel, but one with exquisite pride in her culture and unshakable faith in the tenets of Orthodox Judaism.

Malkie was a rebel, but one with exquisite pride in her culture and unshakable faith in the tenets of Orthodox Judaism.

In her second year of seminary, Malkie was hitting prime time for the dating game. She was hoping to stave the process off just a bit—she was 19, and anywhere up through 23 is an acceptable age for marriage. Her mother was eager, though.

But as Penina began mentioning her daughter to a few of the community matchmakers, she ran up against some disturbing roadblocks:

> It's like we're in a caste or something. Whenever I mention someone from a "good" family, people with strong lineage or money, they immediately have a reason against it. They won't even try. And if I insist, they come back with the message that the boy's family is not interested....We just don't rate over here, us *baalei teshuvah* with our cramped, rented apartment and our bills up to the sky.

Of course, the choosiness went both ways. One young man seemed compatible with Malkie, but Penina had heard that his mother had suffered a nervous breakdown. "That could be a genetic thing, and I'm very inclined just to reject him. Malkie doesn't need that."

"Mom," Malkie finally groaned. "I guess I'm just a more carefree person. It doesn't bother me as much. I see the humor in it, actually," Malkie told me later.

Though she has never done anything explicitly condemned by Jewish law, she has pushed the limits about as far as possible within the technically legal but practically verboten range. She has never touched a man or had anything resembling a boyfriend, but she has flirted with an aggressiveness rare even among the more rebellious set.

On a ski trip that winter, Malkie recognized two Lubavitch boys about her age. They had not been on Malkie's bus; they had decided on their own to try out this mysterious sport that so many in the secular world seemed to love. She approached them, and announced, giggling: "I know you guys! I'm gonna tell your principal I saw you here."

They laughed and offered the very true response that Mrs. Gorowitz of Bais Rivka wouldn't be too pleased to discover what Malkie was doing with her afternoon. Skiing is fine with an organized group of Lubavitch girls, but never under circumstances that could inspire mingling with boys.

"But you'll never know who I am," Malkie countered; she was wearing a ski mask that covered most of her face. She was grinning and shaking slightly; this was a thrill, but it was a bit nerve-racking.

Lubavitch bans mixed gender friendships, but manning the phones at work has presented Malkie with some intriguing dilemmas. Often she will strike up a bit of a relationship

with one of the men she deals with over the phone. He'll call back, continually, pretending to have work-related issues. He and Malkie will speak for hours, trading stories about their lives. This is a highlight of Malkie's life; she anticipates these calls like a secular college student might anticipate a date. "Did I tell you the *accountant* called?" she'd ask me, dreamily, and she'd regale me with stories about him.

She has never touched a man or had anything resembling a boyfriend, but she has flirted with an aggressiveness rare even among the more rebellious set.

College provided its own questionable pleasures. Touro maintains separate classes for men and women, and their courses are scheduled on separate days to eliminate coeducational mingling in the halls. But male professors, graduate students, and staff can certainly be found on campus even during the women's classes. Malkie will often spy someone out and cultivate a furtive little relationship involving nods, glances, occasional interchanges. Before long, she will know his story. She told me about a computer science graduate student: "He's brilliant, and I just love that in men," she gushed, her cheeks flushed from excitement and a bit of embarrassment.

I asked if she would ever consider marrying one of her phone buddies or school chums. She was horrified: "Oh no. I need a Lubavitcher. This is just harmless playing."

Her behavior would probably shock many of her seminary classmates.

One spring morning I was observing Malkie's seminary classes, as I often did during that year. Her skirts were just barely long enough to avoid censure, but long enough they were, for Malkie had no desire to make a spectacle of herself at school. Her makeup was on the eye-catching side, with bright blush and thick black eyeliner, but heavy makeup was common here, so she nearly blended in.

About 15 students were assembled, several in designer suits, others in casual sweaters. The majority wore makeup, often heavily applied, their thick foundation slathered generously and visibly. Many worked hard to give an impression of attractiveness; after all, matchmakers might ask their teachers about their physical appearance.

[One] teacher, *Morah* Firestone, was a fairly young, slender woman sporting a blonde wig; she looked both hip and unfailingly religious in her long straight skirt and yellow cardigan sweater. The topics were of unquestionable interest to everyone: dating, marriage, and love.

"Dating is the arena in which the most important decision in your life will be made," Firestone said with calm decisiveness, and the girls listened attentively, for it was true; the

husbands who emerged out of the dating process would be their partners in their major goal in life: raising a Jewish family.

"You shouldn't be dating for romance," Firestone continued, echoing a theme I heard over and over in discussions of Lubavitch marriage. "The love will grow as you start living with him." This is a well-understood credo in Lubavitch: infatuation is ephemeral; the real test is the lifetime of caring and trust you will build.

Firestone quickly moved onto the actual married scene which will follow the dating game. "There is a big question here: how do you argue with your husband?"

An attractive young woman in a sleek navy blue suit was mystified: "What's so hard? Just tell him you didn't like what he said or how he acted or whatever." Other girls nodded in agreement. Indeed, wives in this community do not tend to be wilting and meek; most of the girls' mothers probably spoke their minds with ease to their fathers.

Firestone had another question that yielded an immediate response: "What if you come from a family where the men help and your husband doesn't?"

"Train him!" a bunch of girls yelled out in chorus. Here, the task may be a bit harder than the young women anticipate; exoneration from household chores seemed ingrained in many males here.

Through all of this, Malkie listened attentively but offered no comment. At the "train him" comment, she glanced at me with a sly smile. She had told me many times how much she pitied women who were so swamped with housework that they lacked energy for an outside job. "Don't they want their own money?" she'd ask, scornfully. She hopes for another job as well, to give her life balance, but she embraces with true passion the goal of teaching non-religious Jews about Hasidism.

Malkie's relationship with me epitomized her seesaw-like alternation between pushing boundaries and spiritual conviction. We met at a small birthday party for one of her friends. I noticed her immediately. At school she received little attention, but with her small circle of friends, she was a real character who reaped constant good natured teasing. "Hey, Malkie, where's the flood?" a blonde young woman called out, eyeing Malkie's green satiny skirt that left her knees bare. "Malkie, are you using that men's deodorant today?" an olive skinned girl asked, giggling. A few weeks before, she had found the deodorant in Malkie's room and was stunned and oddly delighted. It was a very Malkie-like form of rebellion—on the cusp of the unacceptable. I asked the group if Jewish law prohibited women from using men's deodorant. "Oh, I *knew* you were going to ask that," Malkie laughed. She never did answer the question. People are not supposed to wear clothes meant for the opposite gender, but deodorant, after all, is not clothes. As always, Malkie verged on the forbidden but didn't quite cross over.

While Malkie found certain aspects of my life enthralling, she knew that, at bottom, I had it all wrong. She asked me when I planned to get married; marriage was not one of my plans.

I looked at the floor. "I think it's about time you found someone. Raising Jewish children is the most important thing you can do."

Perhaps my behavior could spur the coming of the Messiah; Lubavitch teaches that every Jewish law followed, no matter how seemingly trivial, has profound mystical power. One more Jewish wedding could catapult the universe into the Messianic age. Miniskirts and mysterious phone pals notwithstanding, this was Malkie's most fundamental craving. ■

STEPHANIE WELLEN LEVINE is a teaching fellow at Harvard University.

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Jewish . . . with a problem

BY NATASHA ROSENSTOCK

It was the night before my twenty-second birthday. I'd come to the "coffeehouse" night at the Orthodox synagogue in Washington, where I'd been attending services for a few months. I was proud to be asking Rabbi Barry Freundel of Kesher Israel in Georgetown how to *kasher* (make kosher) my kitchen. Instead, I found myself on an island of shock in the middle of the noisy kiddush room, the chatter of learning all around me, while I struggled to hold back tears of shame. I'd just been told I wasn't Jewish.

This was months after I'd decided to make a real commitment to learning and performing *mitzvot* (commandments from G-d), and I was devastated. I had gone to Hillel my junior year in college to make a place for Reform students and discovered that I didn't know anything about Judaism. I began hanging out with the Orthodox students and discovering the joy and peace of Shabbat and holidays.

My senior year the feminist side of me was still resisting Orthodoxy. I wrote my own column in *The Daily Illini* at the University of Illinois, devoted almost exclusively to feminist issues, and traveled on a bus overnight to Washington, D.C. for the *Roe v. Wade* anniversary with the campus pro-choice group. Then the Hillel rabbi insisted I go to Israel during the winter break of my senior year.

I participated in Kabbalat Shabbat services on the top of a mountain in Tzfat, dancing with other women while the sun went down. On that trip I decided that observant Judaism was the truth. I went back to Hillel that first Friday night after my trip and went to the Reform services. After five minutes I walked out and went downstairs to the Orthodox services. The *mechitzah* (separator between men and women) has never bothered me since.

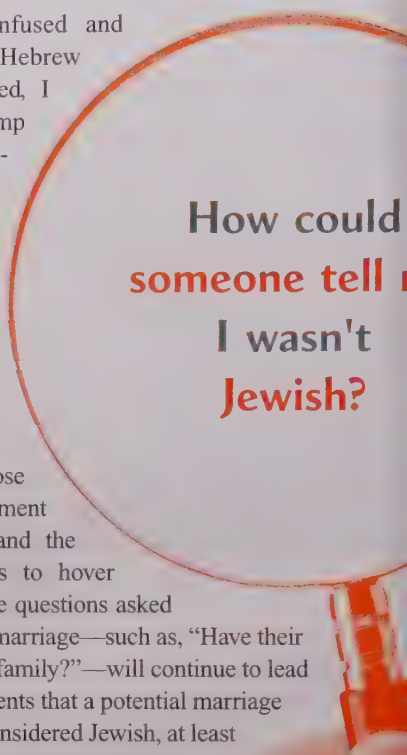
This reality forced me to re-examine my entire way of life, my entire identity as a radical feminist who had never before considered immersing herself in the Orthodox community. It wasn't until I'd experienced Modern Orthodoxy that I realized Judaism isn't sexist, it's only that communities can make it so. Today I do not feel that my involvement in the synagogue suffers because I cannot read from the Torah on the *bimah*.

But as Rabbi Freundel stood in front of me that evening, my suffering was immense. Everyone was still talking on the other side of the room, but for me, time had stopped. Rabbi Freundel kept saying how sorry he was. It was the second time that night he'd had to tell someone they weren't Jewish. And the first person had his mother with him. He advised me not to tell my family. They'd only be hurt that their good efforts were insufficient, he said.

I was angry, hurt, confused and ashamed. I had gone to Hebrew school, even been confirmed, I went to a Jewish summer camp and retreat every year, participated in youth groups, and been raised as a Jew by what I had always thought of as two Jewish parents. I even joined a Jewish sorority in college. How could someone tell me I wasn't Jewish?

"I'm so sorry to have to be telling you this," he said.

As the *baalei teshuvah* (those who return to the faith) movement grows stronger each year, and the intermarriage rate continues to hover around 50 percent, the routine questions asked by almost every rabbi before marriage—such as, "Have their been any conversions in your family?"—will continue to lead to heartbreaking pronouncements that a potential marriage partner may not actually be considered Jewish, at least not by Orthodox and Conservative standards.



I'd always thought that because my mom went to the mikvah as part of her conversion, it automatically meant her conversion was done in accordance with Orthodox Jewish law. But there's another twist; her rabbi was Conservative, not Orthodox. And it turns out that Orthodox rabbis will not accept the conversions performed by their Conservative, Reconstructionist or Reform colleagues.

I have friends who have encountered situations like mine so often that they've started calling it "Jewish, with a problem."

Rabbi Freundel says the most common reaction he gets after giving this unwelcome news about sudden non-Jewish status is anger. Some people are angry at their parents, he says.

Me? I wanted only to be accepted and to fix the situation I was in.

When I first discovered this issue, I didn't even think I wanted to get married, much less become Orthodox. At the same time, I couldn't imagine not being part of the Jewish community so I told the rabbi I would start working on the conversion and just kind of figure things out as they went. Fast forward a couple of months and I am working hard

on my conversion reading list and meeting with the rabbi regularly. But deep down I was sure I could never keep kosher and be *shomer shabbas* (follow the laws of the Sabbath). Then I fell in love with an Episcopalian.

Fast forward another six months and I've given up. I'm engaged to—and moving in with—my Episcopalian fiancé. I told the rabbi that, while I understood I couldn't keep working to convert, I wanted to keep learning. But at a certain point, when I was feeling very strong in my relationship with my fiancé, I became very angry about the whole situation. I defiantly joined a popular Conservative synagogue.

We kept a kosher home, but after a few months I found myself having to agree to some compromises.

First, I let him buy food that was probably technically kosher but did not have a *hekhsher* (label of kosher certification). That seemed to work for a while. Then I had to agree to some more compromises, such as letting him keep a set of *treif* (non-kosher) dishes and buy unkosher meat. Meanwhile, I realized how unsatisfied I was with the Conservative synagogue and started going back to Kesher Israel.

And the more time I spent with Jewish families on holidays and Shabbat, the more I realized that I wanted a Jewish family of my own. The more my time was spent with the synagogue community, the more I realized that I was totally alone in this. Worse, I couldn't even join the synagogue on my own as a Jew.

I talked to Rabbi Freundel again. He encouraged me to ask my mom for the name of the rabbi who had converted her those many years before, in order to find out, once and for all, if there was a problem. Rabbi Freundel said I was considered "borderline" because we weren't sure of the status of her rabbi. So I had to tell my mom. I spent days rehearsing and writing down how I would ask her about this. She knew I was becoming more religious, and it didn't seem to make much sense to tell her I might not be Jewish, and it might be her fault. I ended up mumbling about formalities and insisting that it really didn't matter, I just needed the information to check it out for membership in the synagogue.

Rabbi Freundel handed down a verdict: the rabbi who had converted my mother was no longer Orthodox, and I should have a conversion just to be sure. Never shutting any doors to me, he told me that I could call him anytime if I wanted to do something about this.

Meanwhile, everything changed. My fiancé and I broke up —over pie crust. I came home on a Saturday night after having been out all day for Shabbat and saw a pie crust package sticking out of the garbage. It was a brand that I knew was not only not *hechshered*, but contained lard. It was no big deal, I said, I wasn't going to eat his pie and I wasn't planning to burn down the oven. But just for future reference, I said, he shouldn't buy that crust again.

Instead of saying "okay" and moving on, he got very defensive. In that moment, I felt the future open up in front of me. I could see all the struggles we were going to have for the next 50 years, and realized I wasn't strong enough to keep having the same fights. We had both compromised ourselves away so much and yet we still weren't happy.

I was considered "borderline" because of the status of the rabbi who converted my mother.

For the couple of years I was engaged and in this limbo, I didn't understand why G-d would want me to be so trapped and confused. I would think, "If this is a test, I'm not passing it." But I did pass it. After my years of torture, going back and forth about what I would do, the decision seemed so simple and clear in the end. I could stay with him and not live a Jewish life, or I could leave him and live a Jewish life. The second we broke up I started keeping Shabbat and stopped eating out in *treif* restaurants. Nine months later I had my conversion ceremony. It was suddenly easy.

Four-and-a-half years later, I'm *halakhically* Jewish. I'm living on my own, kosher, *shomer shabbas*. Sometimes I learn two or three times a week, including Yiddish, Hebrew, *parsha* (the weekly Torah portion).

My identical twin sister, Lani, is currently very happy in her relationship with her boyfriend who is Hindu, from Surinam. She does not have the same views as I do about Judaism and the conversion issue. In fact, unlike me, she's never really been excited about Judaism and the Jewish community.

She says, "My theory is that Orthodox Judaism—for you, and for a lot of people who convert—is about looking for the structure we didn't have. It's like any kind of cult where people who didn't necessarily have a family structure, or weren't happy with what they had, are looking for a group to belong to with rules and regulations. It's an easy way to find a real family."

While she says she's okay with my life choices as long as I'm happy, for her Orthodox Judaism seems irrelevant to the modern world. "There's nothing wrong with being religious," she said to me recently, "But at this point in the 21st century extremism is just silly. I'm just somebody who thinks your relationship with G-d doesn't have to do with rules and what you do and where you go and who you do it with. When I realized I didn't believe in Judaism I realized I shouldn't even bother myself to do the little things like holiday dinners, because I was looking for comfort in going but I wasn't finding it."

As for me, I have found my comfort zone, and in a way I'm lucky. At first I was frustrated that other people could be considered *halakhically* Jewish without being observant, but now I see all of this as a blessing, as a plan leading me to solidify this way of life for myself.

At this point I'm not ready to advocate for any particular policy. I only know that this difficult journey has taken me right where I'm supposed to be. ■

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Half-Jew

BY REBECCA TUHUS-DUBROW

Here are some snapshot images of the holiday season from my childhood: my dad retreats to his study while my mother, brother and I decorate the Christmas tree, which my mother has "reclaimed" as a pagan symbol. We light the menorah for the first night of Hanukkah (to be forgotten for the seven subsequent evenings), while Dad excavates the prayers from the depths of his memories and Mom hums along gamely. On Christmas Day, we tear open presents, make our annual expedition to an otherwise empty movie theater, and then attend the klezmer concert at the local synagogue.

This is my family: a hodgepodge of semi-secularized, haphazard traditions drawn from each heritage. My dad, though an atheist, identifies with his Jewish roots, while my mother, who once aspired to be a nun, now calls herself a recovering Catholic.

But being half-Jewish is about much more than religion. My mixed identity is manifest in many ways: in my hard-to-place appearance; the comfort I feel with different kinds of people; the greater freedom I feel to construct my own identity; and the privileged stereoscopic vision of a simultaneous insider/outsider. When I watch Woody Allen playing the neurotic New York Jew, I can laugh simultaneously at him and with him.

Growing up in a mixed household, a certain amount of confusion comes with the territory, a sense of not quite belonging anywhere. My identity, if not simple, is very clear: I identify strongly, however paradoxical it sounds, with being a half-Jew. For me, and for an increasing number of half-Jews, any limitations this status conveys are outweighed by the advantage of belonging to two worlds. Being mixed isn't half an identity, or no identity; that mixture is a synergetic whole. And of the people I met, especially the ones my age—I'm 24—there seemed to be at least as many half-Jews as whole Jews. A new army of half-breeds is emerging in my generation—and, not surprisingly, the numbers are growing.

I was vaguely aware of the argument that intermarriage was a threat to Judaism—a sentiment that reaches apocalyptic tones among some Orthodox Jews, who call intermarriage the "silent holocaust." But those same zealots insist there's no such thing as a half-Jew. Their equation is simple: if your mother is Jewish, you are a full-fledged Jew; if your mother is not Jewish, you are *goyish* too, regardless of other familial blood, religious practices, or personal identification, unless you undergo the official conversion process. At the other end of the spectrum, Reform Jews consider someone Jewish who has one Jewish parent (either one) and who considers herself Jewish.

Of all of the mixed breeds out there, half-Jewish is the only blend I know of whose existence is in dispute. Being half-Jewish is more complicated, because being *Jewish* is more complicated. "Jewishness" can mean a religion, a culture, and an ethnicity, and for most people it entails some combination of all three.

The prevailing sentiments about religion in some mixed households seem to range from ambivalence to indifference to downright hostility. This makes sense, since in many cases religious apathy was probably a prerequisite for the match in the first place. Wendy Marston, the founder of the website *halfjew.com*, came from a vehemently irreligious family. Her mother, Christian by upbringing, refused to say "under God" in the pledge of allegiance. Wendy herself doesn't believe in God, she says, and describes herself as "not good at religion." She is engaged to a fellow half-Jew, and their self-consciously half-Jewish wedding will incorporate a Protestant minister, a huppa, and, as Wendy calls it, "the glass thing." Her attitude is, "If there is a God, it's good to have Him on our side."

For many half-Jews, their religious experience consists of nods to both sides. In my case, that means lighting the menorah at least once during Hanukah, and attending the occasional Friday night service. For others, it can be a more thoughtful, serious, organic syncretism. These days, there seems to be a trend, regardless of background and blood, to choose elements from various religions and mix them into a personalized spiritual cocktail. It's arguably consumerist, and typically American, to feel unrestricted by the arbitrary accident of background.

Twenty-four-year-old Dania Rejandra, for example, has a Jewish mother and a Hindu Indian father. Although she grew up with little religious education, she is now embracing her double heritage—especially her Jewish half. "I never felt like they competed," she says of her different lineages. "I have more of a choice, more to learn about. I have more agency." Dania celebrates Passover, fasts for Yom Kippur, and goes to temple on High

Holidays. The comfort she feels in embracing both heritages might reflect the lack of tension between Hinduism and Judaism in general, which, unfortunately, doesn't always apply to the relationship of Judaism to Christianity or Islam.

Wendy Marston first started pondering the half-Jewish question when she was hanging out with a fellow half-Jewish friend. She noticed that her identity would "flip" to reflect her company, be it Jewish or *goyish*, in a Zelig-like way. I have chosen to associate more—or less—with my Jewish identity over the years, and not always for particularly honorable reasons.

I remember one encounter with anti-Semitism as a child. I was sitting in music class in seventh grade, an awkward 12-year old with braces and Brillo-pad hair. It somehow came up that I was Jewish, and Ken Cavallaro, a popular boy in my group, threw a coin across the room for me to fetch. It was a joke, and I didn't even get it. It had to be explained to me that Jews were money-hungry. I felt the launch of a blush, a mild shame. For a while after that experience, when people asked if I was Jewish, I always specified "half." Now I feel that if I'm talking to a non-Jew about a Jewish issue, my double identity grants me some of the authority of a Jew (whether deserved or not!) without putting too much distance between us. In other words, I can serve as something of a bridge.

At certain junctures of history, those identifying labels acquire much greater weight. Half-Jews in Nazi Germany were subject to complicated laws that discriminated among various levels of *mischling*, as they were called. The idea was always to balance the desire to purify the race—there was never any question that Hitler wanted eventually to destroy people with any drop of Jewish blood—with the need to maintain social order. After all, half-Jews all had gentile relatives, who might protest if their family members were slaughtered. So some half-Jews passed as gentiles, while others cast in their lot with Jews. It's an unbearable choice to imagine.

To identify wholeheartedly with a certain group, to ally every particle of yourself with that group, entails many of the contradictions of being human. You have to put yourself on the line, and sacrifice a bit of your individuality, though at the same time, this identification defines you. It's a tradeoff between different kinds of risks: you get the security of the group's protection, but the risk of being attacked in the name of the group.

David Berreby writes on halfJew.com, "I flattered myself that half-Jews are closer to Nature; we're what happens when men and women are free to let their human feelings guide them, as opposed to following a lot of arbitrary rules. Let Nature take its course, and you get us."

It seems that under any circumstances, there will be the Romeos and Juliets who violate all restrictions in pursuit of their union. In highly restrictive societies, you could say that the offspring of these couples are the result of nature, or exceptional passion or bravery. In times when social constraints are much looser, such as our own, the mutts reflect the openness of society. And, of course, there are many more mutts in such times—hence the somewhat recent, and accelerating, growth of the half-Jewish population.

Inevitably, as my generation arrives at marrying and childbearing age, half-Jews will come up against another question. In the past, people have often stuck to their own kind in choosing a mate, but what does that mean when it comes to half-Jews? Dania wants her children to have some connection to both of her traditions. Wendy Marston, though she is marrying a fellow half-Jew, says she's always been an "equal opportunity dater." Me, too; but I've always been particularly drawn to Jewish men. I flatter myself that I could offer the forbidden thrill of the *shiksa*, combined with the comfort and security of the nice Jewish girl.

A new army of "half-breeds" is emerging in my generation.

And the next generation will hold even more half-Jews, but also many quarter-Jews and three-quarters-Jews. Rabbi Herb Brockman, a Reform rabbi with a congregation in New Haven, Connecticut, estimates that about 15 percent of the kids who go through his Mishkan Israel Hebrew school have one non-Jewish parent. He asks "What's the opportunity?" The Jewish community can either welcome us or exclude us; and if it chooses to exclude us, that would not only reflect, I think, an ossified mindset, but also would sacrifice a huge potential membership. So part of it is simple math. And since half-Jews are extraordinarily diverse—racially, ideologically, culturally—part of it is a matter of exhibiting the flexibility and eclecticism that have always been key to Judaism's strength. ■

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The Statistics

The rate of intermarriage has increased dramatically over the last few decades, from less than 10 percent in 1960 to about 50 percent in 1990, according to the National Jewish Population Study, and has continued to rise since then, increasing the number of half-Jewish children exponentially. In the words of the 1990 study's report, "The pattern of Jewish identity for children whose parents are intermarried (currently of different religions) is crucial for the future composition and size of the Jewish population given the current high rate of intermarriage." And by the time of the next survey of Jews in North America—2001, "there are about 2,900,000 households in North America in which there is a person who is either Jewish, of Jewish descent or is married to a Jewish person or someone of Jewish descent. Of that 2,900,000, about 1,400,000 are what we might call "mixed" households where only one of the current or former marriage partners is Jewish or of Jewish ancestry," according to demographer and sociologist Dr. Egon Mayer, chair of the department of Sociology at Queens College, New York.

Wearing Pants in Shul

BY RACHEL BARENBLAT

My grandmother never spoke a word of Hebrew. She was born into an assimilated Czech family in the early 1900s; her parents' Judaism was cultural, not religious. She married a Russian doctor who liked to boast that he almost attended rabbinical school.

My mother, their oldest child, never learned Hebrew either. (How could she, moving around the American south as my grandfather, by then a thoracic surgeon, followed his Veterans' Administration postings without complaint? Sometimes they were the only Jews in town, the nearest synagogue hours away.) But my generation broke the trend; I learned the aleph-bet at eight; I was blessed with a Jewish education that the women before me couldn't have dreamed of.

My experiences of synagogue worship were mixed-gender. Still, it seemed normal to me that women my mother's age, and my grandmother's, couldn't read Hebrew. They thumbed the English sides of the siddur pages. When something wasn't transliterated, they hummed along. I was different. I could follow my grandfather's rapid-fire recitation. I was breaking the gender paradigm. Now and then I urged my mother to learn Hebrew, but she never did. Her life was full enough without it.

Fast-forward a decade or two. My grandparents, may their memory be for a blessing, are gone. I stopped hounding my mother to learn Hebrew years ago. I am five years married, happily so. My husband is a marvelous man in more ways than I can count. It happens that he is the child of a Jewish-Christian intermarriage, and does not consider himself Jewish.

Like my grandfather, I had a near-miss with rabbinical school. And like my grandfather, I've married someone who neither speaks nor reads Hebrew; someone whose affiliations with Judaism are familial and cultural, rather than religious. Here the comparison breaks down, inasmuch as my grandmother was Jewish and Ethan isn't; but I sometimes wonder whether my grandfather would laugh at this further way he and I have proven alike.

In my grandparents' generation, and even to some extent in my parents', women *expected* to be shortchanged in Jewish education. The disparity between my grandparents' religious educations was the norm. Boys went to *heder*; girls didn't. It never would have occurred to my Grandma Lali to be frustrated by that.

My father, a first-generation American who grew up in San Antonio, became bar mitzvah at 13. But Hebrew school was an opportunity my mother never had, though in high school she trekked to the nearest city to meet other Jewish teens, and she spent a few summers at a Zionist camp in Louisiana (where she met my father).

My generation puts a lot more stock in gender equality, and sometimes in breaking down gender binarisms altogether.

Being married to an outsider gives me new insight into what it means to be inside.

Much to my mother's amusement, Ethan and I planned our wedding together; we share household tasks once considered "women's work." I'm learning to use his power tools; he cooks and sews better than I do. So it's strange for me, perhaps for both of us, to have a sphere of our lives where I'm the one who wears the pants.

When we're in synagogue together, I'm the one who knows what's going on. I'm the one who's comfortable. I'm the one who can read the texts and parse the complicated matrix of *minhagim*, customs,

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which vary so widely from shul to shul. I'm the tour guide.

And no matter how I try to prepare him for what's in store, there's a good chance I'll miss something. The language and the liturgy are so familiar to me that I forget what it's like to be new. Maybe, having learned Hebrew in second grade and having attended synagogue my entire life, I've never really known what being a synagogue outsider is like.

Even visiting church with Ethan and his family isn't quite analogous: services are in English, and the hymnals help me fake my way when it's time to sing. Synagogue liturgies, in contrast, are almost always bilingual; we rarely provide sheet music, and transliterations and translations aren't always up to the task.

I love knowing what I know about Judaism. And I love being married to the man I married. But sometimes I wish I could encapsulate my years of study and give them to him: a magical hearing aid that would translate on-the-fly, a potion that would transmit my liturgical familiarity and context and memories. On a good day, synagogue worship gives me moments of real connection with the tradition and the community and my sense of the Divine; I don't think he finds those here. Navigating the waters of Hebrew and unwritten melodies and congregational customs takes up too much attention, and there's no focus left for religious experience.

I'm not entirely comfortable being the one who wears the pants. I'm happy when we're on equal footing, but being in the position of power is strange to me. Fortunately, Ethan handles synagogue experiences with grace…and there are times in our dance, like when we travel to the foreign countries where he works and knows the ropes, when it's clearly his turn to lead.

Over time, I'm realizing that the religious power dynamic isn't as one-way as it might seem. Being married to an "outsider" has given me new insight into what it means to be "inside;" Ethan is not the only one learning, here. I may be the tour guide, but it's the process of introducing my tradition to my husband that has shown me how Judaism is quirky and sweet and strange. ■

RACHEL BARENBLAT is author of two poetry chapbooks, most recently *What Stays* (Bennington Writing Seminars Alumni Chapbook Series, 2002). She is working on a book about Jewish ritualcraft.

Tallit for a Late Bat Mitzvah

BY DAVI WALDERS

A hundred generations after Tamar,
in the year of her own jubilee,
a woman still hungers for Torah.
She will be cold on the *bimah*
alone. Gone are the arms of family.
Only a longing for the threads
of their blessing remains.

She has never worn a *tallit,*
never even thought of it.
But she is older now
And will be cold on the bimah
alone. Tamar's words whisper
of necessity's sudden impulse,
a sudden turning, of choosing

a new path, mountains, gold
and green, woven with words
into pure wool to cover
shoulders, breasts, heart.
Threads of family, weft
of generations, Torah and *haftorah*
wisdom on a woman's tallit.

Blue *tzitzit* cornered
And tied. Wearing words,
Chanting words, *"Vayet eleha*
el haderech. And he turned
towards her on the path."
Warmed by words and old
worlds. Holding them close.

DAVI WALDERS is an award-winning poet whose work has appeared in *Words: Contemporary American Women Writers* and *Beyond Lament: Poets of the World Bearing Witness to the Holocaust.* She developed and directs the Vital Signs Poetry Project at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, MD, for families with children in treatment for life-threatening illnesses.

The Song at the Sea

A SHORT STORY BY JENNIFER M. PÁQUETTE

I think I throw up into the darkness, and I push because I can't help it. My *tichel,* the sweaty black headscarf, slips over my eyes and I leave it so I won't have to see. I want to cross my legs, sew my cervix shut and wait for sepsis to set in. Hardly anyone dies in childbirth anymore, but I can try.

I've had nightmares about this moment for months. In the nightmares—*shit.* The pain was nothing like this. "I can see the head!" Dr. Rosen, herself pregnant, almost six months.

"This isn't his," I gasp, but my voice is faint. This is Bill's, this midwinter baby. I don't want Stephen touching it, thinking it is his. In the darkness behind me, a voice counts the baby's fingers and toes. The voice is Bill no it's Stephen no it's Bill. But then, Stephen's calm breath above my forehead. "Here are your glasses."

They are pushing something towards me. Stephen's voice says, "I don't know if she's ready." Like a good Jewish husband, he's kept his eyes above the sheets, but it's my face I don't want him to see. Down there, I'm strong, but in my face, I'm vulnerable.

"Of course she's ready." It's one of the nurses. There's a tug between my legs—the doctor stitching me up. I don't want to touch the flannel, but the nurse presses the bundle between my fingers and I have to open my eyes. "Here's your boy."

Will the eyes be brown, dumb cow-eyes like Stephen's? But when I look, I'm staring directly into the clearest icy-blue depths I have ever seen. Winter eyes, and the baby doesn't cry; just grimaces a little, squints at the snow-bright light. His face contorts and he looks just like Bill—I'm in bed again with Bill. I shudder. "Take it away," I tell the nurse. *Why isn't he here with me?* The nurse chuckles and hands the baby to Stephen. The weight is gone, but I still can't breathe. "Lots of first-time mammas are too tired to snuggle."

"This isn't her first time," Stephen says. "Just mine. She's got two big ones at home."

"Third time," I say weakly from the delivery bed, but again, nobody notices. The anesthesia is wearing off and Dr. Rosen's stitches are stabs now in my still-raw flesh. "This is our third child." Mine and Bill's: *Why can't Stephen see that?*

Stephen rubs my head again. "Of course," he says. "I still love Evan and Zoe, even now that I have one of my own." I let Stephen rub my hair, like he does with his cat's belly, watching television, but then he remembers we're not supposed to touch. He snatches his hand away. "You did good," he murmurs, blushing.

Out of the corner of my consciousness, the nurse returns, a lilac-scented blur. I barely open my eyes. The tichel has come untied but I can't bring myself to care; it's lost somewhere in the blankets that surround me. Nobody seems to notice that my hair is exposed. I wanted to do it right, with Stephen, but I feel like that fell away months ago, even before I lay with Bill.

Stephen takes the bundle from the nurse. I hear Stephen lift the baby up, up, almost to the light. "That's him," he says. "That's my baby." I drift away, and in dreams, I see Bill, hovering, demanding this baby he knows nothing about.

"It's time," Stephen said, almost a year ago. He wanted us to start making babies. He grinned the way he did whenever he thought about sex: embarrassed, but grateful. Fidgeting shyly with his yarmulke like in the pictures of him signing our marriage contract. Amazed I'd be willing to sleep with him. That I'd give him children, hearty Skolnick kids like his sisters-in-law kept popping out.

I have imagined a family portrait. Me in the middle, surrounded by bulging Skolnick foreheads, blunt Skolnick noses, and the endless drear of their mouth-breathing monosyllables. My own two children stand with me. Zoe's delicate lake-blue eyes. And Evan, grinning from ear to ear, but probably plotting to take apart the photographer's equipment. After I switched him to the Jewish school, he was speaking Hebrew

inside of a month; the principal confided that he was probably the brightest kid she'd ever had.

When Zoe was born, my mother-in-law told me, "You two make beautiful babies." Even then, the marriage wasn't going well. My parents said it was punishment for marrying a *goy*. My mother-in-law didn't see it that way, but even she didn't know why her son wouldn't touch us. "I just can't *deal* with it," he said, finally, when he left.

Dealing with it is Stephen's specialty. *Find a guy your kids like*, the articles say. I saw how well he dealt with the detritus; I couldn't pass him up. He could deal with snowsuits in the morning, keeping track of each of the kids' little breakfast cereal routines. An excellent father, which was all I needed then.

Stephen asked me to go off the Pill, and he made love to me, gently, gently. "Your kids are beautiful," he said. "I want to make more of them with you. I want our family to grow." Stephen said all the right things, but I couldn't bring myself to stop taking it. I didn't want those big gap teeth like Stephen's nephew Shmuli.

In May, Bill came to visit the kids. He phoned ahead to let me know and to schedule our coffee shop time. Usually, I'd spend our whole conversation steering him onto a neutral topic. But it was hard not to slip back into the pattern of joking and talking like nothing had happened. "We get along so well," Bill would say. "It's such a shame."

The night he called, I finally went off the Pill. Stephen wanted to make love a few days later, but I said I was tired. Bill would have told me how hurt he was that I'd push him away, but Stephen doesn't read meanings into things. He even rubbed my back until I fell asleep that night, and the night after, and didn't say a word about his cock pressing into me.

They say things are iffy, fertility-wise, your first month off the Pill, but we'd conceived easily enough before. I imagined Stephen's sperm: sluggish, easily tricked into flocking around a nonexistent ovum. Bill was different—his smart, aggressive sperm would persist; I never doubted they would find a way.

I wonder if Bill noticed anything unusual that time at Starbucks. "You know, there isn't a day that goes past that I don't think about you," he said. "So many good memories."

Normally, I would have changed the subject; this time, I let myself be drawn in. "Stephen wants children," I blurted, then felt almost ashamed, taking his name in vain.

"You *have* children," Bill said. "We have children; the best."

"They are pretty special." They were beautiful and brilliant, and I wanted more.

It was a short walk from Starbucks to where Bill was staying, at the Delta. In his room, he watched as I peeled off the layers from my hair. First the hat, wool with a brooch pinned in front. Then the tichel and beneath it, a hairband and ponytail to ensure no hair escaped. Only my husband was allowed to see it. I knew Bill wouldn't ask why I would carry condoms, or even wonder if the brooch pin was sharp enough to pierce nearly-invisible holes in them all.

Amazing what bodies remember, flung back together like that. I closed my eyes the way I always had. Bill's little cock made me feel almost empty inside, compared to Stephen, who fills me with happiness. Maybe Bill was my soul-mate, but I had no complaints with the body things Stephen gives me. I told myself I was with Bill for my children. This baby will look like Evan and Zoe; it will be their equal. I tell myself I'm doing everyone a favour. There are enough Skolnicks in the world already.

I knew Bill was very close. "Don't you want to come?" he asked, noticing at last that I wasn't moving around.

"It's okay," I said, and he came, then flopped back onto the bed. He didn't comment when I slipped out of bed and went into the bathroom to change. Hat securely in place, I left the hotel with his semen inside of me. It's mine, I thought, and alive.

At home, I said I wasn't feeling well. "His visits always take a lot out of you, don't they?" Stephen said. "Don't worry; I'll take the kids out for pizza."

I lay down for the rest of the evening, visualizing Bill's sperm, snapping and whipping within me. By the time he left town, I knew I was pregnant. I hoped Bill could sense it too, even from his great distance.

I imagined Stephen's sperm: sluggish, easily tricked into flocking around a nonexistent ovum. Bill was different—his aggressive sperm would persist.

They have hauled me, like a corpse, into an almost-bare hospital room. The only colour comes from flowers in a vase on the dresser. Stephen and I are alone together for the first time since I went into labour. He talks awkwardly: my mother is looking after Evan and Zoe, everyone sends their love. So strange, this leisurely Friday afternoon; these are normally the most hectic hours of the week.

"What time is Shabbos?" I ask.

"Don't worry; my mother sent food," he says, and I relax again.

He's propped up in a wooden rocking chair. The bassinet is beside him; they keep them in the room now. Whenever the baby makes a noise, Stephen picks it up or pats it. I want to scream at him to stop. He glances over, notices my eyes are open. "What about a name?" he asks softly.

I shake my head. "No, no. It doesn't need a name."

"I made a list," he says. "Should I read it to you?" He pulls out his notebook, the same one he uses to make his lists: groceries for the cottage, packing to go to Ottawa, to Montreal. All the places Bill never took me. But right now, I don't want any part of Stephen's lists.

"Don't," I say, rolling away. But the bright light from the window hurts my eyes, and I have to roll back to look at him. I glance at the cart beside the bed and notice my hospital sandwich has arrived.

"My parents are asking," he says.

"It's my decision."

"Yes," he says slowly. This is the other thing about Stephen. He's calm. "Did you think of any?"

"A few," I lie. "Good names."

"Great."

"We'll pick a name soon. I'm tired."

"The bris isn't for a week, but I need to talk it over with the Rav first. What am I going to say?"

I lean past him, even though I know he must be hungry, and grab the sandwich off the plate. Egg salad. I eat both halves right away, without stopping to wash my hands and make a *bracha*. I hadn't realized how hungry I was. Stephen watches me patiently, making plans, no doubt, to go find out if they have mushroom-barley soup in the kosher cafeteria. He can wait.

I tell him, "Tell him, 'It's my wife's baby.'"

There's a little carton of milk on the tray, but I know it won't be enough.

"I need milk," I say. "I'm so thirsty."

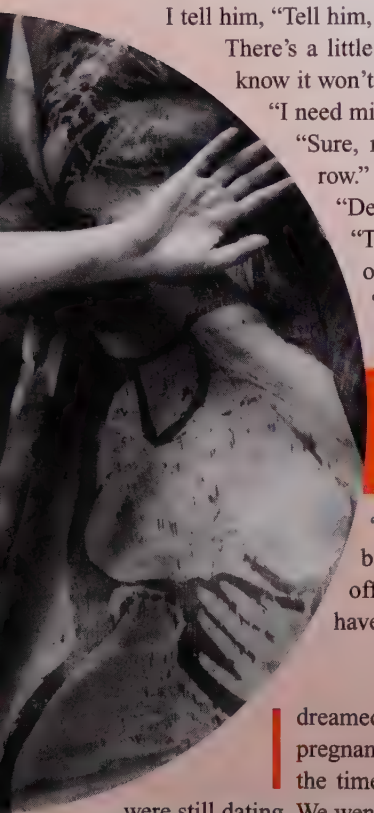
"Sure, no problem. We'll decide tomorrow."

"Decide what?"

"The name." He pauses. "Tomorrow, okay?"

"I'm too tired right now."

He nods as if I've agreed.



"Of course; you rest. I'll be right back with more milk. I might stop off in the cafeteria to see if they have soup."

I dreamed about Bill the whole time I was pregnant, imagined him showing up, like the time he visited, while Stephen and I were still dating. We went up the CN Tower. We had one of those days where you just want to fall into bed with each other at the end of it. His hand at the small of my back made my thighs tingle intimately; I felt flushed whenever his hand rubbed against mine accidentally.

I went home at the end of that day, imagining the whole time that Bill would arrive at the door with flowers, toys for the kids, move back in so we could be a family again. Stephen was the only obstacle; him and his ponderous, old-fashioned religion. I called and told him it was over.

Two more days, Bill and I played hooky with the kids in daycare. I felt Stephen's absence, and it was a relief. Bill was lighter, less serious. On his last evening, after the kids were in bed, Bill called and asked if he could come over. My chest was warm and I shuddered. I wanted him.

On the phone, I could hear shouting in the background; he was calling from a pub downtown. The taste of his lithe little tongue against mine; that was all I wanted. His fingers on my feet, my wrists.

And then Zoe stood at my bedroom door. "Mommy?" She was crying.

"Just a second," I told Bill. "What is it, Zoodles?" I called out into the hallway.

"I had an accident!" Zoe wailed.

"I'll be there in a minute," I said, picking up the phone. Bill was saying something, but I couldn't make out what. "Bill?"

"Yeah?" he said, over the pub noise. "Sounds like you're too busy tonight."

"Wait—" I said. "Wait, it's only Zoe."

"Somebody here needs the phone," he said, and he was gone. I didn't even get a chance to slam the receiver down.

Zoe called to me from the hallway. "Mommy?"

"Just look after it," I said.

"What? My bed is wet."

"Sleep on the floor, then."

Later that night, when I remembered her, I went and peeked in on Zoe. She was lying, curled up on the carpet, half on top of and half wrapped up in her swim-class towel.

I must have called Stephen sometime that evening, because he was there in the morning. He's been there almost every morning, ever since. And even though I felt so weak in that moment, he acts now like I gained some mysterious power in that short time away.

If I had been in Egypt, I wouldn't have been redeemed.

Day and night blur in the hospital. I light electric Shabbos candles and they burn in the room long after the hallway lights are dimmed. Stephen wishes me a good Shabbos, but nurses clatter outside like it's noon on a weekday.

Stephen tells stories from the weekly *parsha*, the Torah portion he'll hear in synagogue in the morning. He says it's a special Shabbos, but none of it has anything to do with me. *Shabbos Shira*—when the Jews sing Shira, the Song at the Sea, a gratitude-song for their redemption from Egypt. The story this week follows them, hiking through the desert towards Sinai, eating manna that falls each morning. It doesn't fall on Shabbos, but some rebels sprinkle some on the ground on Shabbos, trying to prove that Moses' teachings were false.

"In school, we'd make bird feeders for Shabbos Shira," Stephen says. He wants me to ask why, but I can't. I just stare at the pinkish curtains, not even wondering. "When they left manna on the ground and went to get the rest of the Jews to come and look, birds came along and ate up every crumb. So every year, we made bird-feeders, in gratitude for saving our faith."

How could their faith have been so fragile after all those miracles? I want to ask, but I can't. I suddenly need to get out of this room, away from Stephen and this baby. I'm too frozen to think in here. If Stephen knew what I've done, he might say that if I had been in Egypt, I wouldn't have been redeemed.

ART BY © ROCHELLE RUBINSTEIN

1-888-2-LILITH

The ones without faith, clinging to familiar Egyptian ways, those Jews perished in the Plague of Darkness. I shuddered when I read that in synagogue, imagining the frozen darkness closing in and strangling me.

"I need a shower," I say out loud. Even though it's Shabbos, I know there are exceptions.

The shower room is cold. I pull off the flimsy nightgown. The stitches between my legs sting and I'm scared that they will burst. There are no muscles left up there, it's all numb, and when the hot water hits me in the shower stall, I break out in goosebumps all over. Crouched down, adjusting the temperature, I start to sneeze. The muscles don't resist and pee dribbles down my leg in pathetic bursts with every sneeze.

There is nothing left for me beyond the walls of this room. Bill is miles away. Stephen is eager to claim me and my children, but I don't want any part of it. I'm covered in snot and womb-blood and piss, freezing and unwanted, so I stand there in the shower for the longest time, just trying to thaw.

After a few minutes, I hear Stephen's voice. "Kath?"

"I'm okay," I call out, though I'm starting to feel woozy from the steam. I soap around the least painful parts of my body before I shut off the water.

I don't want to see Stephen, but he's standing right beside the door.

"Thought you'd drowned," he jokes when I emerge, holding out a scratchy hospital bathrobe like a butler. He's not supposed to pass me things directly, not when I'm bleeding. Everything I had to learn seemed such a small price, before. Now, he drops the robe onto the floor for me to take.

I won't pick it up; I turn and walk away. "Get away from me," I say, striding towards the nursing station.

The nurse doesn't notice I'm not smiling; she has news. "Perfect timing! He's just waking up now."

I lean over the counter to peer into the bassinet. The flannel is blocking his face, and I reach to push it aside. Another blur. A flash of black, and suddenly, I'm falling.

I'm on the floor, and doctors are standing over me, three of them in green and white, with mildly concerned looks.

The youngest-looking doctor is grinning. "Beautiful kid you've got there, you might say he's a knockout." Nobody but Stephen laughs. I know I will die if I try to look at that beautiful baby again.

"I have to give the baby back to Bill," I say out loud. "I don't want this one." But my voice has no substance.

Stephen leads my body, and my body goes along with him. I count the floor tiles as we walk. The nurse follows with the bassinet, and hands Stephen a bottle once I'm back on the bed. After she leaves, I stare at the corkboard, the flowers on the dresser beside the artificial candles. Everywhere except at Stephen and the baby.

"Hey," announces Stephen. "He's gone to sleep again. Guess he wasn't hungry after all."

"Kath?" It's Stephen, gently nudging me awake. "Honey?" Morning already. He's let me sleep through.

Dr. Rosen is here. Stephen leaves the room and I spread my legs open obediently. The way she's bustling, I can tell this visit is purely routine: get in, get out. Usually I admire her style; efficient, too busy to pry. But now, I need to tell her—and the words just wouldn't come out.

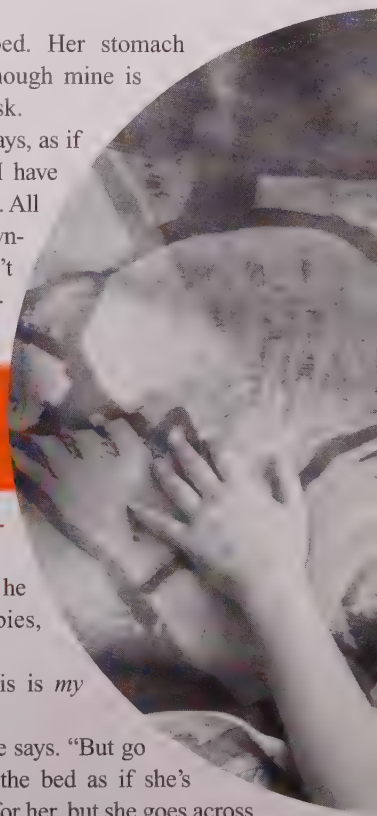
"Good Shabbos," she says. I'd forgotten, she's Jewish, too. Not like us; she probably came by car. "Heard you guys had some excitement last night." She pulls on a glove and smears it with jelly.

Dr. Rosen shoves her fingers up deep inside of me, then out again, with a sucking noise that tugs at the stitches and stings. When she's finished, she sits on the side of my bed. "Have you held the baby?" she asks.

"I can't *look* at the baby," I say.

She nods, shifting on the bed. Her stomach bulges, bigger than mine now, though mine is still swollen. "Is it really his?" I ask.

"It takes a while to bond," she says, as if my motherhood is the issue. But I have witnesses; this baby came out of me. All Stephen has as evidence is a thrown-away pill packet. "You probably don't remember from last time; these feelings are completely normal."



"I don't want him around. This is my baby, just mine."

"Stephen doesn't know anything."

She probably thinks I mean he doesn't understand about babies, because she nods. "He'll learn."

"I don't want him around. This is *my* baby; just mine."

"You've been through a lot," she says. "But go easy on him." She gets up from the bed as if she's answered all my questions. I reach for her, but she goes across the room to wash her hands. "It'll be good, don't worry," she says, throwing away the gloves and the little packet of jelly.

I want to tell her to wait, tell her everything that's happened, but she's already on her way out, saying she'll be back tomorrow to discharge us, and wishing me a good Shabbos. I'm about to say her name, her first name, to make her really listen, but I can't. I hear her out in the hallway, telling Stephen he can go back in now.

When Stephen comes back, he's smiling. She probably said we'd be going home tomorrow. That wouldn't have made Bill happy—he'd imagine all kinds of dire medical scenarios. Or wonder how stressful life would be with a new baby. But this is Stephen.

He's obviously relieved to see me sitting up. "You do look better. I guess you needed your sleep."

"When are you going to shul?" I ask. There's an old synagogue a couple of blocks from the hospital.

"I'm back already. You were out like a light."

Suddenly, the speaker beside my bed crackles. "Mrs. Skolnick?" It's the nursing station. There's a wailing noise in the background. "Your son is up; fixing to eat a horse. Are you nursing?"

I look at the full bottle from last night, unwanted on the dresser. Through all those months I never thought about this. I realize my breasts are sore, and wonder why Dr. Rosen didn't check them or even ask if my milk had come in.

Stephen is looking at me, giving me the look I know means, "Whatever you want will be good." Maybe I can believe him. The sun is just now starting to come up, peeking in around the blinds, and my feet, I realize, are warm at last under the covers.

I nod to Stephen. "Yes," I tell the speaker. I'm not sure if she's heard me, so I clear my throat. "Yes, I'm nursing; bring him in." Another crackle, and the nurse is gone.

"Tell me again about the birds," I tell Stephen.

As he speaks, I imagine what would have happened if the birds hadn't come. Miracle after miracle, but seeing manna on the ground would send them over the edge. The effect of a miracle always wears off and when it does, we're left in the cold, wondering if it ever really happened.

"Why didn't the rebels die in Egypt?" I ask Stephen. "During the plague of darkness."

He answers slowly. "One commentator says they were righteous then; they only stopped believing later." After the big miracles, when reality set in and they realized they could never go back. But how can Stephen understand, when he's never not lived his odd, faithful Jewish life?

"You know," he goes on, "some people say the reason we feed the birds on Shabbos Shira isn't because of the manna at all. It's because birds never stop singing Shira, even when the miracles are far away." I suddenly need to go home; I want to make bird-feeders with Evan and Zoe. Even the baby; this new child, whose face I have barely glimpsed. I want to bring him home, but right now, I don't even know what to call him.

"Do you have any names?" I ask.

Stephen leans over to bring out the notebook I know has never been far from reach.

I stop him. "Actually, I don't think I'm ready."

He frowns, just a little. Worried, perhaps, that I'll never be ready.

"I don't need to hear the list. Whatever you choose will be wonderful."

"Really?"

"Well, I got to name the first two, right?" He nods. "This one's yours; you pick a name."

Stephen's glowing. Completely lit up from the inside. His eyes are wet and when the nurse comes to the door with the baby, a few tears leak down his face. He gets up and brings the bundle, wrapped in blue flannel now, over to me in the bed.

"Here's mamma," he tells the bundle. I peek in, and it's a baby, red-faced from howling. *Just a baby*, I tell myself.

"Quit that," I say, nudging Stephen gently. "You're getting him all wet."

I take the baby, his innocent warm breath against my neck. His mouth gasps at the air, searching for my nipple. I offer it and he is content, snuffling against my skin. My milk descends like dew, drop by drop, draining like healing tears from the centre of my soul. His eyes are wide now, and I can just make out the tiniest flecks of brown there, a soft rich loam like the earth itself, trapped too long beneath the frost. ■

JENNIFER M. PAQUETTE lives with her two children in Toronto, where she is a regular contributor to the Canadian Jewish News. Her articles have been featured on national radio in Canada and the U.S., and her stories appear in periodicals and anthologies.

1-888-2-LILITH

We Have Trespassed: Song of the Slim Girls, Starved

BY SUSAN COMNINOS

We have trespassed; we have dealt treacherously
with our desire, coercing a rebirth from bone;

we have acted perversely; we have done wrong
in our bodies, wishing them hollow as folly;

we have robbed; we have spoken slander
against the grown, women full of the mind;

we have been presumptuous; we have done violence
to ourselves, to our own candied forms;

we have practiced deceit; we have counseled evil
before mirrors, exhorting by example;

we have revolted; we have blasphemed
our wombs to slivers, no blood tricked from ivory;

we have spoken falsehood; we have scoffed
at the edible, animal that it is;

we have rebelled; we have committed iniquity
only in a doze, that nodding boy, who alone knows our skin;

we have been stiff-necked; we have acted wickedly
as sexless pixies, before their hair grows in;

we have transgressed; we have oppressed
appetite, our sentient caterwaul;

we have dealt corruptly; we have committed abomination
as old as the science that declared the earth round;

we have gone astray; we have led others astray —
off the world's abdomen, as we found it, flat.

SUSAN COMNINOS's poems have appeared in *Tikkun*, *Midstream* and *Judaism*, among others. She has also written articles for *The New York Sun*.

Rituals

BY JANET KIRCHHEIMER

When no one is home, I open the box
and take one out, one of the five
white linen sheets my father
brings down from the attic
to hang on the walls of the sukkah.

It is still white, and the fabric still strong.
At the bottom are geometric patterns and the initials
RK embroidered in white
by my father's sister Ruth at 15.
The patterns look as if they were stitched yesterday.

My father brought the sheets with him
to America, while Ruth stayed behind, waiting
for her visa. On the edges

she made buttonholes, the sheets to become the cover
for her comforter, made from the finest goose down,
that she would take to her marriage, and

sitting in her bridal chair like a queen,
I am dancing in front of her,
fulfilling the mitzvah to make the bride and groom happy,
and she is,

and we dance together,
smiling and laughing, dancing round and round,
until we are out of breath, until I am alone, whirling
in circles, so dizzy I can no longer stand.

JANET KIRCHHEIMER's poetry has appeared most recently in *Poetry NZ*, *Cross Currents*, and *eCLAL*, an online review to which she regularly contributes. She lives in New York City.

WRITING MINDS

THREE FIRST-TIME NOVELISTS—ONE IN HER 20S, ONE IN HER 30S, AND ONE IN HER 40S—TALK ABOUT WHY THEY WRITE, WHAT INSPIRES THEM, AND WHY THEIR STORIES AREN'T FOR EVERYONE

BY MELISSA ARONCZYK • PHOTOS BY JOAN ROTH

OUR INTRODUCTION TO JULIE DAVIS IS INNOCUOUS ENOUGH: "...Another young, tallishly attractive girl in a fur-lined leather coat walking across Broadway." The protagonist of Amy Koppelman's first novel, *A Mouthful of Air*, could be your best friend, a next-door neighbor, a woman applying lipstick in the reflection of a store window. But Julie lives in a world where buying peaches consumes the entire day, a trip to the park is a near-disaster, and neither therapy, medication, nor the love of a devoted husband and children can penetrate her solitary shell of depression.

But for Koppelman, 33, *A Mouthful of Air* is a book of hope. "Julie made the wrong choice for herself, how she defined being a good mother," Koppelman says, sitting cross-legged on the grass in Central Park while children, tourists and newlyweds scramble by. "But the reader has the chance to make the right choice...to look for those tiny little happy endings in the world."

A Mouthful of Air has none of the hallmarks of a happy ending—it's probably the most distressing piece of fiction you'll read all year. The writing, spare as an empty attic, reveals Julie's anguish with disturbing clarity. Though Julie struggles to understand and overcome her fears, her scarred wrists belie an equally lacerated soul. The monologue she carries in her head—"If you look happy, then you are happy"—"I have become a Cosmo article"—"You are going to fail"—show that she is far from breaking the surface of the debilitating illness that envelops her.

Koppelman started writing fiction in elementary school. But it wasn't until 1994 that she decided to take a writing class. A few years later, she was accepted to Columbia University's graduate writing program.

"The Columbia MFA program is the best thing that ever happened to me," says Koppelman. "It was a way I could say to my mother and my mother-in-law, 'I'm sorry, I can't do 77 errands for you, because I have to do homework.' It was always much easier for me to say 'homework' than to say 'writing.'"

She wrote *A Mouthful of Air* over a period of years, using the closets in her house as office space. "It's always an uphill battle," she says of her writing process. "You never know if you're going to be able to string another sentence together."

As if writing the novel weren't hard enough, finding someone to publish it was an exercise in frustration. "Every agent I wrote to said, 'This is too dark and depressing for this publishing climate,'" she recalls. One Hollywood agent told her she ought to put the novel into a drawer and forget about it. "He said, 'You want to write a book? Write *Bridget Jones' Diary*!'" recounts Koppelman, laughing at the memory. "And I said, you know, I'd love to write *Bridget Jones' Diary*. But you can only write what you hear."

And it is precisely the difficult subject matter of the novel that has earned it such an overwhelming response. Reviews from *The Boston Herald,* the *New York Observer* and *St. Petersburg Times* signal the book's courage and honesty in its portrayal of post-partum depression—an illness that many women endure but few feel able to discuss. Koppelman knows she's touched a nerve.

"I always thought that the person who would champion the book would be a woman editor, and that it would be a woman's book. But it turned out that a 32-year-old heterosexual guy bought it...Maybe it didn't scare him about himself," she says.

She stops talking for a moment to watch a gauze-veiled bride float through the park, camera-toting family in tow.

"In my heart of hearts," she says, smiling at the bride as she gingerly makes her way across the grass, "I still believe that every once in a while, one of them might be happy."

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"THERE ARE A LOT OF PEOPLE WHO DON'T KNOW WHAT FICTION IS," SAYS A BEMUSED DARA HORN, SITTING IN HER EXQUISITELY DECORATED APARTMENT A STONE'S THROW FROM LINCOLN CENTER IN MANHATTAN.

People would come up to me and say, 'So, do they (the main characters) adopt children?' As if it were a documentary about these people's lives and I know the inside story."

That the characters live beyond the pages of Horn's deftly crafted first novel, *In the Image,* is one of many signs that the book has left its mark on a steadily growing audience.

But Horn, 26, was surprised by its broad appeal. "You imagine your readers being like you, and I found they weren't at all," she says. "I did a reading in Florida, and a woman said, 'Make sure you read the part about Costco.' Then I went to Los Angeles and they said, 'It would be great if you read this part about Holocaust movies.' Then I went to New Orleans, and they said, 'Make sure you tell people that your book is about a hurricane.'

"You see a range of readers in terms of what interests them."

Horn speculates that the common thread that binds her characters also weaves through our own lives. "The experience of immigration, of struggling with tradition... if you're from a religious family—of any religion—these kinds of challenges are something that you're probably familiar with."

Horn never wrote any fiction herself until *In the Image,* composed when she was 22 during a fellowship year at Cambridge University studying modern Hebrew literature.

"During the interview for the Cambridge scholarship, they asked me if I would ever consider writing fiction, and I said no, because I was incapable of making things up," she says. Her summer jobs—at *Time, Newsweek,* and *The New Republic*—were part of her goal to become a journalist. But alone in England, with a notebook she had kept for years brimming with ideas, she started to write.

In the Image begins with the story of Leora, who has recently lost her best friend in an accident. Her self-imposed solitary existence is disrupted when her friend's grandfather, Bill Landsmann, invites her to his home to show her his slides.

"I would like to welcome you on a tour," Bill Landsmann announces to his guest. "A tour on which you will see the many sites of the Hebrew Bible, appearing in images around the world."

The slides begin at the beginning—literally, from Genesis—and soon the images take on a life of their own, propelling Horn's story through time, across generations, beliefs, and fateful encounters.

"The idea of this man going around the world documenting everything," Horn says. "It reminded me of these medieval Jewish travelers, like Benjamin of Tudela, who would travel around the world for their work."

Horn's family also traveled extensively—she estimates she has visited 45 different countries in her reasonably short lifetime. "My brother and sisters and I always thought our parents were spies," she laughs. "There was no other reason why you would bring four kids to Cambodia."

Horn cites her family as her primary influence and inspiration. "We were always encouraged to perform," she says. "For Passover we would act out the whole Seder, with show tunes and elaborate skits. Every time someone had a birthday, Father's Day, Mother's Day, we would do these very long poems."

The four Horn children have pursued their creative streak into adulthood. Horn's 23-year-old sister is putting out a book next year, her brother is inking an animated pilot for a TV series—a collaborative project, with Horn as script-writer—and her other sister, a lawyer, is also an accomplished writer.

Now a Harvard Ph.D. student in Hebrew and Yiddish literature, Horn has no plans to curtail her fiction writing. She divides her time between her thesis and her next novel, part of a two-book deal with W.W. Norton when *In the Image* was published.

"My one-sentence summary of it is, 'It starts with an art heist and ends in Paradise,'" she says tantalizingly. "And to find out what happens in between, you're just going to have to wait and see."

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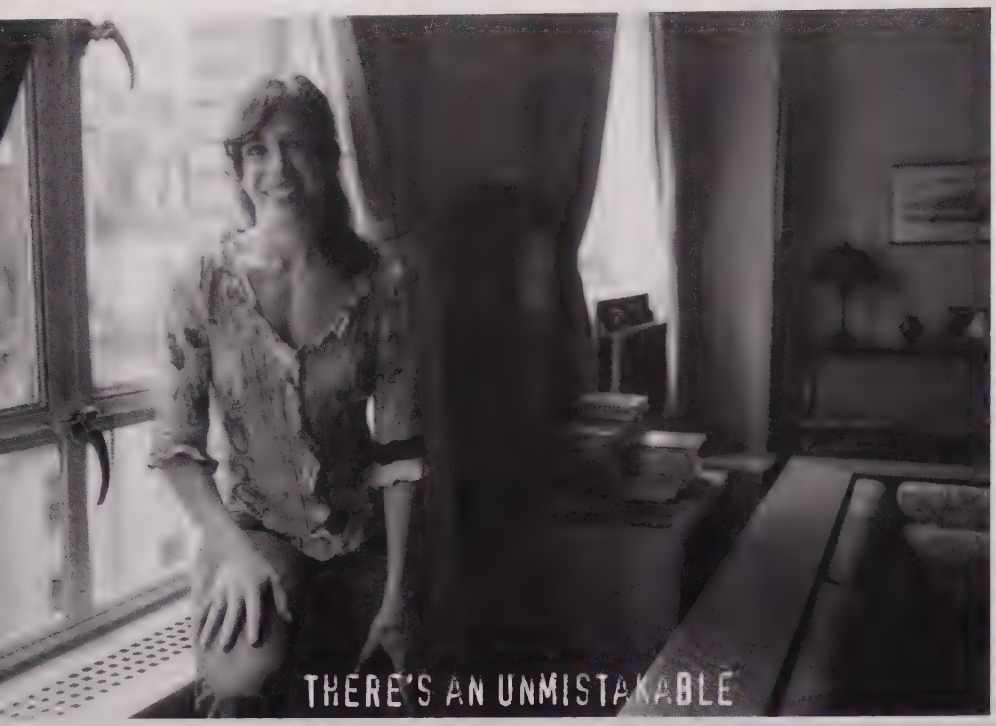

THERE'S AN UNMISTAKABLE SENSE OF DEJÀ VU IN NINA SOLOMON'S DEBUT NOVEL, SINGLE WIFE. Two years after Solomon and her husband were separated, she attended Thanksgiving dinner with her family. Friends of her parents, who didn't know she was divorced, asked if her husband was at work.

"I didn't want to embarrass them," Solomon says. "So I said, 'Yeah, he's working.' Then the fantasy and denial took on a life of its own."

In *Single Wife,* this same condition afflicts Grace Brookman, whose husband, Laz, leaves one morning after breakfast and doesn't come back. At first, there's no cause for alarm—Laz would often disappear for days at a time. But when he doesn't return, Grace sows the seeds of an elaborate ruse, duping everyone into believing he is still around—the maid, the doorman, her parents, even herself. Grace treads the mushy terrain of maintaining appearances until she realizes that throughout her life with her husband, she has pretended to be someone she's not.

Inertia, denial, fear of loss—the impulses that motivate Grace to spin such an elaborate web of deceit are painfully familiar to anyone who has suffered the demise of a relationship. This might explain the novel's widespread appeal.

"Younger and older generations are responding," Solomon says. And in a telling commentary on male-female dynamics, she notes that men and women react differently to the story. "Men are jealous of Laz. But women don't think he's great. They hate him."

If the novel's themes are somewhat familiar, the story of how Solomon's novel was published is almost unheard of. "I sent it around to some agents and a week or two later I heard back," she says casually, seeming unaware of the thousands of would-be novelists desperate to see their stories in print. "Several were interested and I just picked one." She chose Algonquin, a small literary publishing house, where she felt she would get more attention than at a large company. *Single Wife* is not only Solomon's first novel, it's her editor's first novel as well.

Though Solomon has been "writing since before I could write," she never dreamed of becoming a novelist. Her father, also a writer, used to sit her on his lap at the typewriter and help her tap out short stories and poems.

She earned a Master's degree in English at Columbia University and became a teacher. But her love of writing led her to join a writing group, which she credits with giving her the support she needed to finish the novel. "I showed them the first three chapters, and they said, 'Keep going,'" she says.

At 41, Solomon is aware that many first-time novelists tend to be younger than she is. But she is clearly undeterred.

"When a dream comes true it doesn't matter when it comes," she says. "And I don't think this novel would have happened any sooner anyway."

"All aspects of your life have to be in balance, then the rest just comes."

Solomon was brought up in "a Jewish home with atheist parents" in New Jersey. "No religion was ever mentioned," she says. "I always thought I was missing something. I felt a yearning for spirituality. My parents found it in music and literature. I wanted something a little more tangible, somewhere I could go."

To hear her describe her writing, you suspect she has found her place. ■

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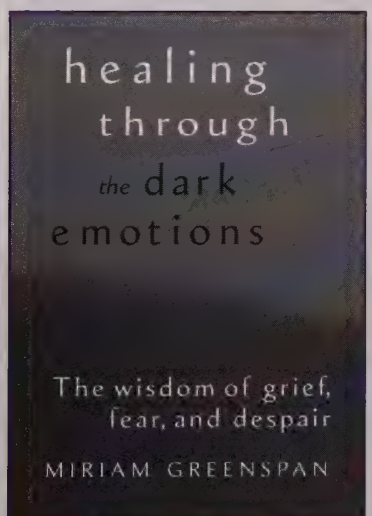

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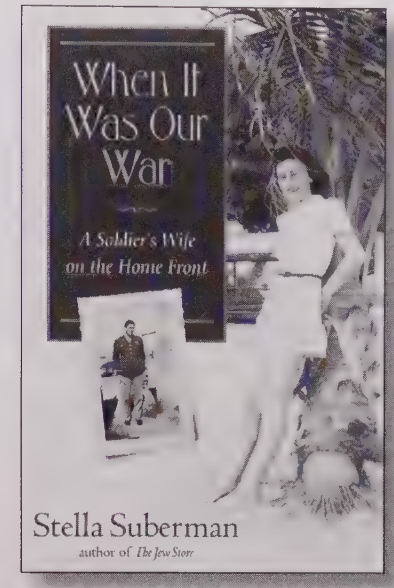

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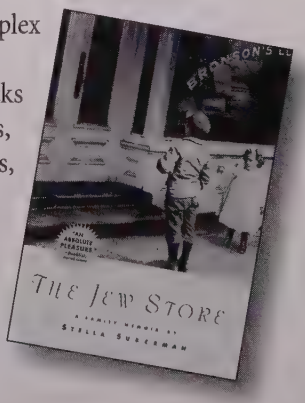

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Reading *The Diary*

Had she lived, Anne Frank would be turning 75 in 2004. Her diary has sold millions of copies in more than 55 languages since it was first published in Dutch in 1947. Naomi Danis elicits some new reactions to the most-read book about the Holocaust.

Dr. Ruth Westheimer *is the psychosexual therapist who pioneered the field of media therapy.*

Anne Frank's diaries have had a tremendous impact on how I've tried to live my life. This year I turned 75, the same age Anne would have been. Like me, Anne was born in Frankfurt am Main. **Had the Nazis not come to power, we might even have met and become friends.** I lost all of my immediate family to the Holocaust, but because I was one of 300 children from Frankfurt sent to a school in Switzerland, I survived, while Anne, like so many millions of others, did not.

Her diaries touched me because of her optimism. I have tried to have a similar positive attitude in my life, which I take as a duty on behalf of all those whose young lives, both Jews and non-Jews, the Nazis snuffed out. **Anne would want to see us forge a new future filled with as much happiness as possible.**

Dara Horn *is 26 and lives in New York City. Her novel* In the Image *(W.W. Norton) was published last fall.* *[See page 29]*

I read Anne Frank's diary when I was 12, ravenously, because I was a journal-keeper myself. But in the end I didn't love the book the way every other 12-year-old did. I felt guilty about it, but what prevented me from loving it was precisely the reason every adult in the world expected me to read it—that third-to-last diary entry, where she writes: **"in spite of everything I still believe that people are really good at heart."**

There is something cheap about that ending, and I think I sensed it even then. It's not just that it turns an intelligent person into a symbol for what we think children are. This idea turns the book's lasting impression into, at best, a crudely sweet sentiment, or at worst, a lie.

Photographs of Anne and handwriting are from **Anne Frank the Writer: An Unfinished Story**, an exhibition at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum through December 12, 2003. This exhibition marks the first time any of Anne Frank's original writings—in her own hand—have been seen outside of the Netherlands. On display are her photo album and her last diary notebook, and some additional writings, which include essays, fairy tales and other works of fiction. A comprehensive online exhibition is available at **www.ushmm.org**.

It has been observed, with irritating irony, that Anne Frank would never have achieved such profound success as a writer if she hadn't been murdered. Fair enough. But the most vital form of success a writer can achieve is not fame at all, but prophecy. Not prophecy in the sense of predicting the future. Prophecy in the sense of telling people what they absolutely need to know, particularly when they don't want to know it. **Most people who comment on Anne Frank's posthumous success imagine an alternate world where she would have grown up peacefully,** settling into a career as a Dutch journalist or novelist, perhaps a writer of interesting insight, but little more. The alternate life I imagine for her, however, would have been far more likely.

The writer I envision is someone who survived Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen as a 15-year-old girl—someone who saw pits of burning bodies and babies shot in the air, someone whose head had been shaved and whose skin had been permanently tattooed and who had watched her mother and teenage sister rot to death, who had withered away to a skeleton and would likely rip someone's face off for another crust of bread, someone who spent an entire teenage year inhaling smoke made out of the bodies of her family and friends—only to be "liberated" at 16 into a world of yet more camps, refugee camps, displaced persons camps, until she was at least 18, and then (possibly infertile, possibly disfigured, possibly disabled, definitely mentally older than the oldest person alive) forced to return to a country and a language in which she no longer has anything to say or anyone to say it to, or worse, becoming bereft of her language, forced to move to a new country and a new language different from the one in which she had lived her life and her near-death—a person who, while spending every night screaming through nightmares and every morning ashamed not to wake up dead, at last has no choice but to turn to prophecy.

Would this be a writer who would vow that *"in spite of everything I still believe that people are really good at heart"*?

Possibly. But I still believe, in spite of everything, that she might have had a whole lot more to tell us.

Susan Goldman Rubin *is the author of more than 35 books for children and adults. Her most recent title is* Searching for Anne Frank: Letters From Amsterdam to Iowa *(Abrams, 2003).*

My older brother and his wife took me to see the play "The Diary of Anne Frank" on Broadway when it opened in 1955. I was about Anne's age, 15, so I identified with her as a teenager and as a Jewish girl. I also read *Anne Frank: The Diary of A Young Girl* and was deeply moved by her courage, her yearnings, her accurate understanding of adolescence.

Years later at the Simon Wiesenthal Center-Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles, **I was flabbergasted to come across little-known pen pal letters written by Anne and Margot, in English, in 1940 to two sisters their ages in Iowa.** How did these American girls happen to correspond with the Frank sisters?

As I sifted through layers of information I reread Anne's diary as well as her short stories and essays, and everything I could find that had been written about her. In Amsterdam, I interviewed a woman who had been Anne's best friend during their year at the Jewish Lyceum.

Anne was more of a real, well-rounded girl than I had realized. She loved movies and movie stars, especially those in America, and collected pictures of them. In her short story "Dreams of Movie Stardom" she fantasized about taking a trip to Hollywood and staying with two sisters who are movie stars. She loved boys and romance, yet she also wanted a career and planned to be a writer. Perhaps her isolation in hiding forced her to turn to writing as a comfort and as a substitute for friends.

Leslie Hollis Margulies *is Lilith's advertising manager and a cabaret singer. Her first CD will be released in November.*

I read the *Diary of A Young Girl: Anne Frank* when I was turning 12. It was not a happy year for me. We had just moved out of the suburban house I loved to a small apartment. I missed my friends and my school. My parents were having serious problems, and I was hearing things I didn't want to hear. **All the good things I had assumed would be part of my life seemed to be disappearing. I felt scared and lonely and full of feelings I couldn't name.**

When I read Anne Frank I was amazed, because she seemed just like me. She was forced to move into a small space with her family. She had to leave her school and her friends. Everyone around her was getting on her nerves. I loved everything about her. I loved that she could describe her mixed up feelings so well. When I finished reading Anne's diary I told my older sister that I loved it, but she said that a kid couldn't have written a book like that. I knew it was all true, but I didn't say anything.

I envision someone who survived Auschwitz as a 15 year old . . . mentally older than the oldest person alive.

Dara Horn

Rachel Kadish *is the author of the novel* From a Sealed Room *(Putnam, 1998).*

Last spring I taught a course, "Writing About Place," at Boston College. The students read the sections of Anne's diary where she describes the physical setup of her home. I had them read an essay by Caryl Phillips, a British West Indian writer, about how visiting the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam

awakened his political consciousness as a black man in Europe. They also read a short story by Marianne Wiggins, ex-wife of Salman Rushdie, based on their visit to the Anne Frank House when hiding from the *fatwa*.

My students, from all over the country, were mostly Catholic; there were no Jews among them. I had to explain to at least half the class who Salman Rushdie was, and why he had been on the run. But they all knew who Anne Frank was and—with the exception of the student who grew up in Saudi Arabia—they had all read her diary. In fact, **Anne Frank was the *only author* I was able to refer to all semester without needing to give an explanation**. I don't think she ever imagined how famous a writer she would become. That gives me some comfort. It's one dream of hers that was fulfilled.

Andrea King *is a Hollywood screenwriter.*

I still have the 35-cent Pocketbook paperback. I'm sure it was my mother's. On the cover is a photo of an exquisitely beautiful, doe-eyed Millie Perkins. Turned up nose. Beautiful lips. I'm not sure when I realized that she wasn't Anne Frank, that she was the WASPy, idealized Hollywood version from the George Stevens film. But when I finally saw a photograph of the real Anne Frank it all made sense. The eyes. And the nose. And of course the hair. And the realization that **while she looked nothing like the actress who portrayed her, she looked a lot like me. And my mother.** Her words spoke to me—as a teenager, as a girl. But her face, that face, those eyes—they spoke to me as a Jew.

Re-reading the diary as an adult is a completely different experience.

Lara Vapnyar

Lara Vapnyar *came to the U.S. from Russia in 1994. Her short story collection is* There Are Jews in My House *(Pantheon, December 2003). She says, "Like most Russian Jewish people I grew up having very little idea of Jewish history, religion, or habits, but with a very strong sense that being Jewish is something shameful and inferior."*

At the age of 10, I didn't find the book tragic at all. **I thought of their experience as an adventure, something like Robinson Crusoe's life on the island.** I fantasized about living like them, and made various schemes in my head of what dishes I would have cooked with dried peas, what games I could play when it was dark and the electricity was out, or how I would manage to use the toilet without producing a sound. The most memorable thing for me was that Anne, being the youngest, was growing very fast, and grew out of her clothes. I couldn't imagine what I would have done if all my clothes were either too tight or too small.

One reason for my lack of sadness could have been that the book is all about life. Anne is so hungry for every experience life can grant her. As a child, it was very hard for me to connect Anne's diary with death.

Re-reading *The Diary* as an adult is a completely different experience. In the sea of Holocaust literature, most books, understandably, are written by survivors or witnesses. Anne Frank's diary is a rare exception. The fact that it is written by a child makes it reach to your heart in a more profound way than even the greatest works of literature.

Letty Cottin Pogrebin *is the author of the novel* Three Daughters *and the memoir* Deborah, Golda, and Me: Being Female and Jewish in America.

I read the diary when it was first published in the United States in 1952. I was 13 and dreamed of becoming a journalist or writer. Anne was 14 and dreamed of becoming a journalist or writer. I remember thinking that I could have been Anne had my grandparents not been driven out of Eastern Europe in the early years of the 20th century by anti-Semitism, economic duress, and the spectre of pogroms.

I read the book in one sitting in the backyard of my sister's house in Peekskill, New York. My sister, 14 years my senior, had two children, and I was supposed to be minding them, but I was a criminally negligent babysitter that day, so mesmerizing was Anne's story. When I looked up from the last page, I realized that my two little nephews, who'd been playing virtually unsupervised, would probably not exist had my grandparents not had the courage to leave their shtetl for the New World. It struck me as tragically **ironic that an earlier persecution of the Jews was responsible for my family being safe in America while Anne and her family had been hiding in an attic in Amsterdam.**

Yona Zeldis McDonough *'s first novel is* The Four Temperaments *(Ballantine). Her children's biography,* Anne Frank *(Henry Holt, 1997), was illustrated by her mother, artist Malcah Zeldis.*

When I first read *The Diary of Anne Frank* in 1968, age 11, I was most interested in Anne's burgeoning womanhood, her struggles with her mother, her growing attachment to Peter. In short, I was drawn to the experiences that were most like my own. I have to admit that the story of the war—the fear, the hiding, the eventual disastrous exposure—was not at all real to me. **It somehow seemed to exist in some distant past, in a place I had no contact with, enacted by people who could no longer do any harm.** At that time, the war was still fresh for many who had somehow managed to live through it. And yet the distance that those brief decades imposed might as well have been centuries—at least for me.

Years later, as an adult and a mother, writing a children's book about Anne Frank, I returned to the diary. I was visited by a palpable sense of claustrophobia. When I came to the often quoted line, the one that revealed Anne's belief that people were really good at heart, I could neither accept nor believe it. When the fragile curtain that concealed her existence was ripped away, when Anne and the others had to endure the hideous transport, Westerbork, and later Auschwitz, the diary cannot follow them on that final journey. If it had, perhaps Anne would not have written such hopeful words.

Joan Abelove *is the author of* Go and Come Back *(1998) and* Saying It Out Loud *(1999).*

What was wrong with me? How could I not like it—it was such an important book, everyone loved it, everyone loved her. I was about her age, I was Jewish, I had loved John Hersey's *The Wall*. I was ashamed of myself, and told no one.

I re-read *The Diary* last week and felt very differently.

I kept thinking about my college professor who said, "The morning after a revolution, people still have to get up and go to work." It was the first time I thought about history in terms of the people who lived through it. That is a very important part of Anne's diary—we get a glimpse of a real teenager who lived during a time in history that I have always thought of in terms of multiples and place names—the six million Jews, the five million non-Jews, the names of the concentration camps, the pictures of piles of bodies, the pictures of skeletonized survivors. In fact, the only thing I know about those of my own family who died in the camps was that they died in the camps. I know nothing about who they were, what they did, what they loved, what they yearned for.

Beverley Naidoo *was born in Johannesburg, where she was jailed as an anti-apartheid activist. She began her writing career in exile in England and is the author of* The Other Side of Truth *and* Out of Bounds: Stories of Conflict and Hope *(HarperCollins).*

The big book of my South African childhood has to be *The Diary of Anne Frank*. I loved Anne's bold, youthful honesty. *Aren't the grown-ups idiotic and stupid?* Nor was she afraid to have opinions on bigger, political matters. Her voice was that of the child calling for justice. *Why do some people have to starve, while there are surpluses rotting in other parts of the world?*

There was, however, a terrible irony in my admiration for Anne. I was a white child in a racist society where white South Africans committed their own crimes against humanity. **I cried over Anne without seeing the crimes of apartheid all around me.** Only years later did I understand that Anne was not just writing about racism against Jews. She condemned racism itself—against anyone. I know she wouldn't tolerate racism against Arabs. I still love the freshness and brave outspokenness of her voice, her despising of hypocrisy and passion for justice. Her diary helped to plant a seed in me.

Anne Frank's Diary appears "almost like a character" in **Aidan Chambers**'s *novel* Postcards from No Man's Land *(HarperCollins, 2002). He lives in England.*

I was a boy in my mid teens when I came across *The Diary of Anne Frank*. I knew nothing about Anne, but already had a taste for diaries and an unrequited hankering for a girlfriend. As soon as I started reading it and realized what was happening to Anne, a childhood experience added itself to my feelings about her book. One day in April 1945, I was sitting in a cinema when the Newsreel came on. It showed British troops entering Belsen. I regard this moment as the end of my childhood. I knew what Anne and her family were trying to avoid; I knew what kind of death she had suffered. I read her book with more attention than I had ever read anything before. I also fell in love with her. **Because of her terrible end and the status—almost that of an icon—that she has acquired, people don't see, or prefer not to see, what a sexy young woman she was**. Sexy in the best sense. Physically vivid, mentally acute and sharp, incisive in her understanding, especially of herself, questing and passionate. How could a teenage boy not fall in love with a girl who could write herself into the pages of a book with such clarity?

Carolyn Mackler *wrote the teen novels* The Earth, My Butt, and Other Big Round Things *and* Love and Other Four-Letter Words.

One thread of the journal that has taken up permanent residence in my mind is Anne's growing relationship with Peter and all of the utterly "normal" chatter surrounding her crush. **Even in dire circumstances, a 15-year-old girl can still fill pages about a boy,** detailing each encounter with the precision of a heart surgeon. As I write my own novels, I frequently think of Anne and Peter, and therefore I never, ever forget the magnificent power of a teen crush.

Jane Gottesman *is co-curator, with Geoffrey Biddle, of the photographic exhibition and book* Game Face: What Does a Female Athlete Look Like?

As a kid, I studied the family portraits displayed on a wall in my maternal grandparents' house in Connecticut. My mother was the stiffly posed child with a shy smile. My father was that eager young naval officer with dark hair. Two generations of family hung on that wall like a loose patchwork and I spent hours staring at those photographs, learning about the circle of life. **Anne Frank's picture, though it wasn't on the wall at Grandma and Grandpa's house, was a photograph I studied intensely in that era.** I read Anne's private thoughts in her diary, I examined her likeness on the cover of that paperback—intelligent, vulnerable, playful and poised—and I faced the fact of innocents meeting unnatural deaths.

When I think of Anne Frank now, my visual memory trumps my memory for the written word; I suppose a well-made portrait reveals a person's character in ways that words cannot.

She became for me a victim not only of the Nazi regime but also of patriarchal society.

Alice Shalvi

Born in London, and evacuated to Canada during World War II, **Lynne Reid Banks** *has written 39 books, including* The Indian in the Cupboard *and two books on Jewish history.*

Every reference to the *Diary*, every film made about Anne, and the very sight of "the house" when I saw it in Amsterdam, turns my mind sick and fills me with rage. For me, she stands for all the wicked waste of human, and especially Jewish, potential in that period, the disgust I feel still for the Germans (not just the Nazis), and my sense that just as they as a nation are forever tainted with disgrace, our species as a whole is fatally flawed. **We should have learned some final, transcendent lesson from the tragedy of this one child**. As an icon of lost beauty and talent, she stands forever as a marker of what the human race could be and isn't and never will be because we are so much better at destruction than creation.

Social worker **Rita J. Kaplan** *is the CEO of the Rita J. & Stanley H. Kaplan Family Foundation.*

Anne Frank and I were within a year in age. I cannot remember when I read the book, but I do remember my intense response—shivering—as I realized that I was safe in New York. My Polish maternal grandmother had lost her whole immediate and extended family in the concentration camps, so **the Franks' plight introduced me to the realness of my grandmother's loss.**

Nava Semel's *children's book* Becoming Gershona *received the 1990 National Jewish Book Award.*

My first teacher in writing was Anna Frank. She is the one who taught me that it was possible to turn myself into the character of a story and tell it through "me" instead of "he" or "she." **Anna told me: look around you, the closest places.**

I was 12 years old when I first read Anna's diary. I was a a *sabra* whose mother was a Holocaust survivor. Anna was a fragile reflection of myself in another world, threatening, yet so familiar. The last page of her diary is engraved in my memory. *"I'm awfully scared that everyone who knows me as I always am will discover that I have another side..."* But Anna, this "other side" is what inspires me the most.

Anna still accompanies my writing hand.To the protagonist of my book, "Bride On Paper," I gave the name Anna. But my Anna survived because she immigrated to Israel before the catastrophe. Perhaps I was trying to save the first Anna, at least on paper.

Alice Shalvi, *who has lived in Jerusalem since 1949, headed the Pelech Experimental High School for Religious Girls, was founding Chairwoman of the Israel Women's Network and chairs the Executive of the Schechter Institute of Jewish Studies.*

In 1953, a student of mine at the Hebrew University who had been a "hidden child" in Belgium during World War II presented me with a copy of the diary, which I read at once. I was 27.

In the 1980s, when I learned from Carol Gilligan that Otto Frank had expurgated those parts of the diary which he thought unseemly, I realized that **Anne Frank was another example of young women silenced by their elders**, particularly the male adults who have authority in the household and with whom, presumably (and paradoxically), they have a better relationship than with their mothers.

Thus she became for me a victim not only of the Nazi regime but also of patriarchal society. I was very happy when the full text was published, revealing an even more rounded personality, with normal adolescent sexual urges and with even more profound insight into the complexities of relationships between men and women, husbands and wives. What a novelist she would have been had she lived!

Ilana Kurshan *works in the editorial department at Alfred A. Knopf in New York.*

As I recorded in my own diary years ago, I met Anne Frank along with another Anne, Anne of Green Gables. Anne Frank inspired me with her will to live and her faith in humanity; Anne of Green Gables, with her imagination and spunk. And while the dangerous, secluded world of the Secret Annex was a far cry from the orchards and cupboards of Green Gables, both Annes became my friends and heroines: I admired their earnest desire to do good, and I laughed each time they got into trouble in spite of themselves. I share with them my romantic ideals, my passion for words, and my commitment to chronicling experience. Even now, over 15 years later, the Annes are with me still.

Daisy Maryles *is Executive Editor of Publishers Weekly.*

I am a child of Holocaust survivors. I was born in a Displaced Persons camp in Ulm, Germany in 1947, the same year the book was published. I read it at 14, about the same age Anne Frank was when she was writing the diary. Not then, or even now, do I think I could be as brutally honest as she was.

In 1999, I visited Amsterdam and her hiding place. I was overwhelmed and could not get over how close it was to the center of town. **It would be like being hidden on Madison Avenue.** A church nearby had a ringing bell, and the canals were right in front of the house. It was only when I looked through the windows showing what Anne Frank and her family saw and heard that I got a deeper understanding of the tragedy.

To be hidden in such a public area was amazing and for me, it made the experience even more tragic. She is only one of a million-and-a-half children murdered by the Nazis. Getting to know her through her diary, you feel an incredible loss. And then you think of all the others killed and how many of them may have been even more special than Anne.

Elka Brandt *is a senior at Columbia University and the Jewish Theological Seminary.*

When I write, I can shake off all my cares.—April 5, 1944. **Anne Frank's journal was a hiding place within a hiding place**; she wrote to create a little personal space for herself. At the same time, she was preparing to be heard, as she wrote on March 29, 1944: *Mr. Bolkestein, the Cabinet Minister, speaking on the Dutch broadcast from London, said that after the war a collection would be made of diaries and letters dealing with the war. Of course, everyone* [in the Annex] *pounced on my diary.* Anne used her journal as a place of her own, as a place not only to "shake off all cares" but to protect hope, belief, and humanity, all of which were threatened in German-occupied Europe. Anne's story is hers, and she had the strength against all odds to let it out. Is it possible for words to be heard over the din of a demanding, chaotic, and tragic world? Anne's diary answers yes, if one is willing to write them.

Elka dedicates these words to the memory of her brother Oren Jacob.

Laura Simms, *a storyteller, is the director of The Gaindeh Project using story with youth in crisis throughout the world. Her new book, love stories for adults, is* The Robe of Love *(Codhill Press).*

I recall the solitary intensity of squatting in my junior high schoolyard at lunch reading it from cover to cover. I was stunned by the cruelty of the Holocaust, realizing my parents had not described what had ended only the year I was born—one of many secrets in our house. The personal account of Anne Frank, almost the same age as I was, allowed me to enter the world of fear, passions, and European Jewishness. I began keeping journals as a result, finding a means of expression that may have nurtured my becoming a writer. Unrequited love became one of my themes; going off to wars and dying another. **I hid the book and my journal in my closet**. I think it freed me as much as it horrified me at that time. ■

Anne Frank Behind the Iron Curtain

BY LEAH MOSES

In 1960, U.S.S.R. authorities decided to "import" Anne Frank's diary, perhaps the only Holocaust document that managed to break through the "Iron Curtain." Ironically, according to official Soviet history, the Holocaust as we know it—the mass murder of Jews only because they were Jews—did not happen at all. The U.S.S.R. authorities believed that Soviet Jews were murdered by Nazis not because they were Jewish, but because they were Soviet citizens.

Admitting that Adolf Hitler considered the Jewish people the Nazis' main target would lead to another, much more dangerous idea: maybe there was something mysteriously *good* in Jewish values, something that made the very existence of Jewish people threatening to the absolute *evil* the Nazis represented. How could Communist leaders accept this when, according to their ideology, absolute *good* could be represented only by the U.S.S.R.—the most progressive country in the world?

The year 1960, when *The Diary of Anna Frank* was first published in Moscow, was the culmination of a period in Soviet history when ideological clutches were loosened. For Soviet Jews, a short break between two major anti-Semitic actions launched by the Kremlin: the infamous "case of medical doctors" and the rise of the anti-Zionist movement after Israel's Six Day War. Jews were relatively free of fear, guilt and shame then: they were no longer identified with the "killers in white medical gowns," and not—yet—with Zionist aggressors that had trodden "friendly Arab people" under their iron heel.

During this "thaw," Soviet values became more liberal, more respectful towards individuals. One could allow herself or himself to be not an ideal Communism-builder, an ordinary human being with a complex nature and a wide spectrum of feelings.

Anne Frank—a young middle-class German Jewish girl killed by Nazi evildoers, Anne with her rich inner world, sweet weaknesses and literary talent—ideally fit into that newly admissible model of a human being.

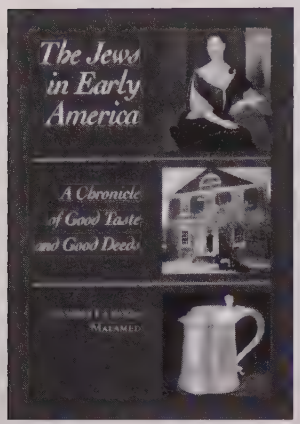
Still, I think, Kremlin leaders hoped that their subjects would not feel sympathy and compassion for Anne. They hoped, on the contrary, their subjects would regard Anne as a spoiled bourgeois brat who dared to complain when she should be grateful for not sharing other Nazi victims' (especially Soviet people's) terrible lot.

Anne Frank was let through the Iron Curtain for the wrong political and ideological reasons. But the reasons she was welcomed into the hearts and minds of Soviet Jews (and Soviet people in general) were not wrong at all. She won our hearts with her personality, her talent, her vulnerability and her tragic fate. Moreover, it was Anne's "poisonous" influence that made us, Soviet Jews, start the long journey towards our heritage, towards discovery of our real role in World War II and in human history in general. Maybe it was Anne who, in the end, helped us break through the Iron Curtain, or even to break the Iron Curtain itself.

LEAH MOSES (MOSHIASHVILI) *was born in Tbilisi, Georgia, former U.S.S.R. in 1953. She has lived in the U.S. since 1994. She is a staff writer for Russian Jewish Forward.* ■

Reviews

Revolutionary Jews



A history that feels far less pefect, and far more real

Since every historian interprets sources according to her own interests and agenda, students of history will often read drastically different versions of the same story. Two recent books about Jews in early America are particularly good examples of this phenomenon. **Sandra Cumings Melamed's *The Jews in Early America: A Chronicle of Good Taste and Good Deeds*** (Fithian Press, $15.95) overlaps with **Emily Bingham**'s ***Mordecai: An Early American Family*** (Hill and Wang, $26.00) in their subject matter. But the stories that they tell—and the conclusions that they draw—could not be more different.

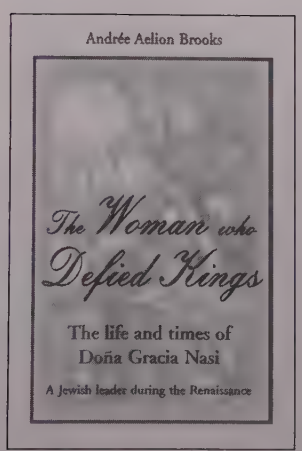
Melamed's *The Jews in Early America* talks about some of the most illustrious Jewish personalities of the American revolutionary period. As can be expected, she includes a great deal of information about well-known figures like Haym Solomon (a main financier of the American Revolution) and Rebecca Gratz (the inspiration for Sir Walter Scott's heroine in *Ivanhoe*). However, most of the individuals featured in this book are far less famous. Her subjects include some rather remarkable women, such as Abigail Minis, a Jewish rancher and innkeeper who supplied George Washington's troops with provisions, and the outspoken Abigail Franks, a founding mother of New York's Shearith Israel Synagogue.

While Melamed succeeds in bringing together a colorful mix of early American Jewish characters, her brief descriptions of their lives are somewhat lacking in complexity. Reading this book, you might assume that all early American Jews were financially successful, devoted to the cause of American independence, and staunchly committed to the Jewish community. Missing from her narrative are their struggles, insecurities, and doubts. Melamed writes a history of mythical heroes—Jewish versions of the George Washington who could not tell a lie.

Bingham's *Mordecai* takes a different approach. Instead of sketching the lives of many early American Jews, Bingham traces the adventures of one illustrious Jewish family, the Mordecais, through three generations from the Revolutionary War to the Civil War. What Bingham loses in breadth she easily makes up with the depth and complexity of her narrative. The Mordecai clan—which includes a large number of extraordinary women—constantly struggled with their Jewish, American and gender identities. While some of the Mordecais were staunchly committed to their Jewish heritage, others converted and became devoted Christians. Many of the Mordecai women tried to live up to the ideal of "enlightened domesticity." Others directly challenged the conventions of marriage. (Rachel Mordecai, an accomplished school headmistress, easily gave up her career for a marriage and domestic life that conformed to the newest scientific theories.) And while the Mordecais were firm believers in American independence during the Revolutionary War, the Civil War disrupted their trust in the United States. As middle-class, white Southerners in America, the majority of the Mordecais were defenders of slavery and the Confederacy. If Bingham's Mordecais seem far more flawed than Melamed's faultless Jewish Americans, they also seem far more human.

The traditional narratives of American history tend to place early Americans on a pedestal. It is only in recent years that the more distasteful qualities of the American "founding fathers" (the fact that Thomas Jefferson was a slaveowner, for instance) have become common knowledge. Melamed gives us the Jewish equivalent of this early American mythology. In a society in which founding *mothers* are often forgotten, Melamed should be credited with including women in this pantheon. But it is Bingham's book that is not afraid to dig a little deeper, to tell a history that feels far less perfect, and far more real.

—RACHEL KRANSON


Andrée Aelion Brooks
The Woman who Defied Kings
The life and times of
Doña Gracia Nasi
A Jewish leader during the Renaissance

Renaissance Heroines

For centuries, Renaissance Italy has provided a backdrop for tales of villains and star-crossed lovers. Two recent books, though they feature old-fashioned romantic intrigue, bring something new to the plot: the heroes are women, the crime is Judaism, and the stakes are conversion or death.

In ***The Woman Who Defied Kings: The Life and Times of Doña Gracia Nasi*** (Paragon House, $23.95) **Andrée Aelion Brooks** chronicles the life of Doña Gracia Nasi, a financial powerhouse of Renaissance Europe and a Spanish *conversa*. The book opens on young Doña Gracia as she inherits her dying

husband's fortune and business and follows her from Inquisition-controlled Iberia to Antwerp, Venice, and Constantinople, providing a window into the cutthroat world of Renaissance finance and the even more dangerous world of the Renaissance convert to Christianity. Late in life, she launches an unsuccessful attempt to rebuild a Jewish community in Tiberias before dying under unknown circumstances.

Brooks reconstructs Doña Gracia's biography from its financial paper trail, relishing each piece of evidence with a thoroughness that slows the book's pace but provides a compelling resource for Renaissance politics, finance, and Jewish life. Despite the author's tangents, Doña Gracia's character leaps out of the archival material—she is headstrong and intelligent, as charismatic as any fictional protagonist.

The heroines of ***A Woman's Voice: Sarah Foner, Hebrew Author of the Haskalah***, (translated and edited by **Morris Rosenthal**, Foner Books, $21.95) are tame by comparison. But one would do well to remember the context in which they were written. Foner was a pioneer—and lone female—writer in modern Hebrew during the 19th-century *Haskalah* (Jewish Enlightenment). In this new translation of her work, we see Foner combining Jewish folktale with pure melodrama. In the Dvinsk of her childhood, a man must pay ransom for his own possessions to a mysterious rabbi; in Renaissance Milan, young Jewish women are abducted by nuns; and in Herodera Israel, kings and priests outdo each other planning bloody *coups d'etat*. But *A Woman's Voice* is more than romance and counterplot: Foner's fiction also reveals passionate Zionism. In language overflowing with biblical references, she connects with ancient Israel by idealizing its beauty and retelling its past. Foner's context adds a crucial layer to an appreciation of her fiction.

Foner's writing can stand alone, though, and her story, like Doña Gracia's, deserves to be told. In bringing their heroines to light, Brooks and Rosenthal have created studies in Jewish history-as-melodrama—only the happy endings are harder to come by.

—MIRIAM FELTON-DANSKY

Reclaiming Women's Wisdom

"The time has come for Jewish tradition to receive the gifts that women's wisdom contributes in order to regain its wholeness..."

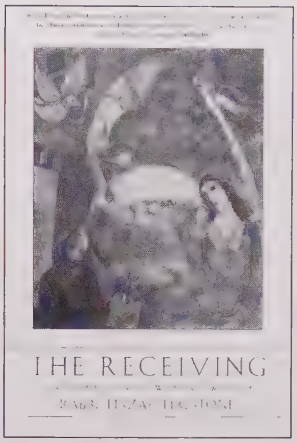
With these words, **Rabbi Tirzah Firestone** takes up the call for women's spirituality in Judaism. The title of her new book, ***The Receiving: Reclaiming Jewish Women's Wisdom*** (HarperSanFrancisco, $24.95) comes from the literal translation of the word "kabbalah," and her exploration of the subject moves from the daily trials of seven women's lives to the esoteric nature of the soul in Jewish mysticism. Her earlier volume, *With Roots in Heaven*, followed her own journey of spiritual evolution. *The Receiving* uses the biographies of seven wise women, all mystics, healers or sages, to illustrate the various *sephirot* (circles or chakras) of the kabbalistic Tree of Life.

The journey begins with Hannah Rachel of Ludomir, a scholar who lived and taught as a rabbi in a 19th-century Ukrainian village. Firestone also celebrates such under-sung heroines as Beruriah of the Talmud, who balanced the dual characteristics of textual expertise with earthy sensuality. According to Firestone, Beruriah embodied the Jewish paradox of striving for spiritual enlightenment while remaining grounded in everyday living, as well as the divide between traditional male and female values. Firestone then introduces us to Malkah of Belz, matriarch of a Hasidic dynasty; Asnat Barzani, a Kurdish healer and sage; and Dulcie of Worms, a scholar in 12th-century Germany who was brutally murdered during the Crusades.

Rabbi Firestone uses the life stories of these women, interwoven with examples from her own psychotherapeutic practice, to reveal the workings of kabbalistic energy and how they apply to women's lives today.

The Receiving is an introduction to kabbalah for any woman just beginning her mystical journey. The concepts are lucidly explained and presented in comprehensible fashion, even to someone without a strong Jewish background. For those further along in their pursuit of kabbalah, this volume provides a fascinating glimpse into the lives of female sages and mystics whom even the more educated may never have met.

—REBECCA SCHWARTZ



Our Reviewers

MIRIAM FELTON-DANSKY is the director of the Jewish Student Press Service. A recent graduate of Barnard College, she is also a writer and dramaturg.

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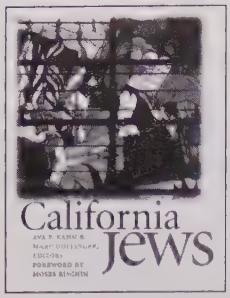
DEBORAH OSMOND lives in Montreal. Her articles have appeared in academic publications on Jewish and British history and in the Canadian national newspaper, *The Globe and Mail*.

REBECCA SCHWARTZ is the editor of *All the Women Followed Her: A Collection of Writings on Miriam the Prophet and the Women of Exodus* (2001). She teaches in the San Francisco Bay Area.

WENDY WISNER's first collection of poems, *Epicenter*, will be published by CustomWords Press in spring 2004. She teaches writing at Hunter College.

Personal Histories



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What's Wrong with Being Female, Jewish, and Educated?

Harriet Pass Freidenreich's new book, ***Female, Jewish, and Educated: The Lives of Central European University Women***, (Indiana University Press, $34.95) documents the life choices of 460 European women in Germany and Austria prior to the Nazi period who decided to become physicians, lawyers, and academics, a decision which inevitably amounts to sacrifice in the realm of marriage and motherhood. Sound familiar to Jewish women today? Freidenreich's point exactly.

"Professional women today often see themselves as path-breaking 'superwomen', juggling careers and homemaking, childcare and commuting. They are generally unaware of the pioneering generations of Jewish university women in Europe, who faced many of the same problems, but dealt with them under different historical circumstances," she writes.

Freidenreich argues that the lives of these groundbreaking women were much harder than women's lives today: not only did they face severe sex discrimination in their academic endeavors, but their careers and ultimately lives became endangered as Hitler came to power. "Nazis targeted this group for multiple reasons, classifying them as 'non-Aryan' academics and professionals, 'double earners', and in certain cases, socialists or communists." While the women in her study were able to emigrate from Germany after being dismissed from their academic positions, most revolutionary professional women were lost to the Holocaust. Had the persecution of Jews not erased their brave steps forward, they too could have served as role models for the Jewish women of today.

Freidenreich shows that present-day Jewish women can learn how to balance their lives, both professional and personal, because it was done before us, long before the 1960s women's movement. This unique group of "New Women" in the early 20th century dared to challenge normative roles of the German middle-class, pursued careers in male work worlds, and defied their roles as mothers and wives in quest of self-fulfillment. "We are the descendants and beneficiaries of these remarkable women whose lives serve as beacons to help usher us into the world of the 21st century."

—ILANA KRAMER

Languages of Loss and Silence

In her seventh poetry collection, ***Threshold*** (Copper Canyon Press, $12), **Shirley Kaufman**, an American-born poet living in Jerusalem since 1973, gives a fearless account of life in her war-torn home. These are poems of witness: bullet casings on the ground, children playing war games, "the flaming rib cage of the bus." Kaufman is always evenhanded in the telling of these events. Nothing is glossed over, but the poems never spew hate at those who have committed violence. "The trouble with anger," Kaufman says, "is that it spills all over/won't/be contained." The war poems are juxtaposed with the poet's private losses: the realities of aging,

and the death of close friends. I was touched by Kaufman's childhood reminiscences. In *They are all we are all,* Kaufman mourns the loss of drinking milkshakes at Jamison's drugstore "for only a nickel," and comments that "you have to be old/to start/talking like that." But even in more solemn poems where a sense of loss weighs heavy on the reader's heart, Kaufman always finds hope. As she says in a love poem to her husband, the act of writing is in itself an act of hope: "I collect these words/…they add up to/just enough to/keep going."

The Knot Garden, **Allison Funk's** third collection (Sheep Meadow Press, $12.95), also explores art as a mode of healing. While Kaufman's words pour out onto the page, Funk's voice is more reserved. In fact, it is the silence of women—its origins and manifestations—that Funk examines. Among the most illuminating of these explorations is the poem sequence ***From the Sketchbooks of Vanessa Bell,*** told in the voice of Bell, Virginia Woolf's sister. Bell, a painter, lived a life marred by the death of a son and intense sibling rivalry. The poems depict the jealousy fueled by Woolf's flirtation and possible affair with Bell's husband. Bell is shown to be at the mercy of her sister, and speechless as a result: "I, who cannot speak of my pain,/Virginia, always wishing to be forgiven,/and Clive, who learned from her/the words to betray me." I was most taken with ***Trained, Wild or Translucent***, a long sequence portraying the poet's suffocating interactions with a dominating father. Here is where her silence took root, but it's also where she found her voice as a poet. "I couldn't have said then what I wanted to find—a language to hide in." Funk's style—while opaque and enigmatic at times—is always magnetizing. I felt that she was right there in the room with me, whispering her haunting words into my ear.

—WENDY WISNER

Reviews

Women's History 101, and Beyond

Two new reference texts appeared this year in the area of Jewish women's history: ***The JPS Guide to Jewish Women: 600 BCE – 1900 CE,*** by **Emily Taitz, Sondra Henry & Cheryl Tallan** (Jewish Publication Society, $25); and ***American Jewish Women's History: A Reader***, edited by **Pamela S. Nadell,** (NYU Press, $24).

The JPS Guide covers much of the same material as *Written Out of History,* Taitz and Henry's 1988 volume. Both books discuss, for example, the Talmudist Beruriah of the Second Century, with evidence of her wisdom and wit as found in textual sources. The new *Guide* also names several other women from the period, although some of them rate little more than a paragraph. The advantage to the new

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volume comes at the beginning and end of each chapter, with more in-depth exploration and commentary about the historic periods and regions covered, and the roles of women in general and Jewish women in particular in that time and place.

Pamela S. Nadell's *American Jewish Women's History* is an anthology of essays ranging from Jewish women's organizations and involvement in labor and civil rights movements to cultural identities and the emergence of modern feminism. Nadell does not give biographical entries as *The JPS Guide* or the 1998 two-volume encyclopedia *Jewish Women in America* do. Rather, the essays focus primarily on 19th- and early-to-mid-20th-century struggles, offering insight into the role of Jewish women in the small moments of history that might go unnoticed.

The entries, though tantalizing, are sometimes dismayingly brief. Both Nadell's own essay, *Women Who Would Be Rabbis,* and Paula Hyman's essay detailing the convergence of and conflict between the women's movement and Jewish feminism only graze major issues.

—REBECCA SCHWARTZ

The Identity Grid

Identity connotes not only the sum of an individual's choices but also the boundaries of a group. But what happens to a group when individual identities cross boundaries? And what happens to an individual when group identities are suppressed? Two new books explore these questions as they affect women, Jews and Others in the history of the New World.

Suzanne Bost, an English professor at James Madison University, looks at race and subjectivity through the lens of *mestizaje*—a Latin American word for the mixture of indigenous, African and European ethnicities—in ***Mulattas and Mestizas: Representing Mixed Identities in the Americas, 1850-2000*** (University of Georgia Press, $39.95). Her ecumenical cultural criticism embraces slave narratives, medieval diaries, popular 19th-century novels, contemporary Chicana literature, and even pop culture and media, from sitcoms to Time magazine.

In Bost's analysis, deep racial anxieties find expression in the recurring literary figure of the "tragic mulatta," an exotically beautiful heroine. Often light-skinned enough to "pass" as white, she is doomed to suffer and even die for her essential "impurity." Like the exotic Jewess of 18th and 19th-century literature, her taboo ambiguity is the object of a sexualized fascination as well. Bost looks at how writers such as Audre Lorde, Judith Ortiz Vofer, and Ruth Behar add bisexuality to the multiplicity of identities. Her argument is strongest when she shows how the contemporary celebration of diversity can mask the fear of mixture and erasure shared by both minorities and majority groups.

In ***Delirio: The Fantastic, the Demonic and the Reel*** (University of Texas Press, $24.95) **Marie Theresa Hernandez** also deals with the threat of erasure, in this autobiographical look at the history and identity myths of the northern Mexican state of Nuevo Leon,

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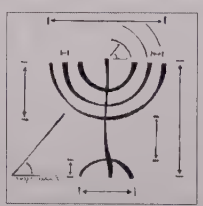
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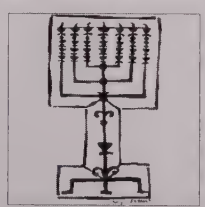
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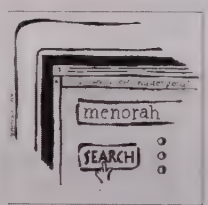

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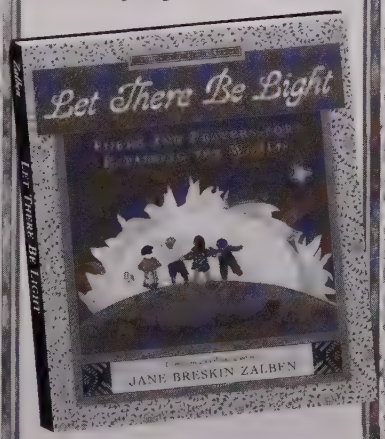

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A Jewish Holy Woman and Her World
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Foreword by Janusz Bardach

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given as an independent concession by the King of Spain to Luis Carvajal y de la Cueva in 1579. Legend has it that the Carvajals were a Jewish family whose members were tortured in the Inquisition, and that Nuevo Leon was settled by several families of *conversos*. Hernandez finds traces of Judaism in many aspects of *norteno* (Northerner) culture, from a recipe for *cabrito* (roasted young goat) which involves "koshering" the meat, to a Catholic mystic named Dona Pepita, whose informal status within the community she compares to the early Hasidim. However, even as she investigates these "secret Jewish stories," other *Nuevo-leneses* vehemently deny the historical existence of any Jews.

—ANYA KAMENETZ

Recipes for Life

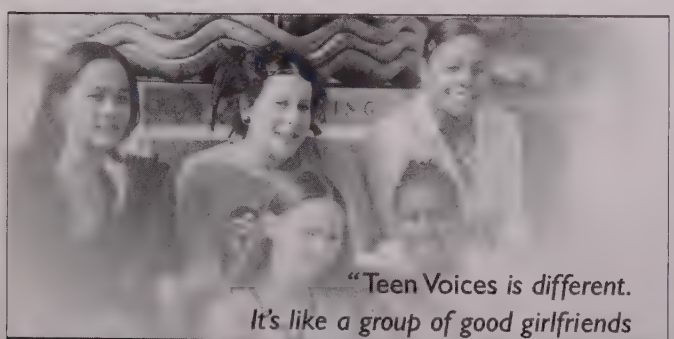
In her new collection of life stories, **Peace in the House: Tales from a Yiddish Kitchen** (David R. Godine, $23.95), **Faye Moskowitz** calls her childhood "preparation for a love affair with words." With candor and elegant simplicity, she remembers a Jewish girlhood in the Midwest of the '30s and '40s, exploring the tensions between immigrants and their second-generation children. Often hilarious, at times heartbreaking, Moskowitz's stories weave together present-day accounts and insights about her complex and painful childhood. She creates a conciliatory bridge between the past and her life now, showing newfound appreciation for what she has learned from Judaism and the women who raised her, like her extended family, *landsleit*, and her mother, whom she loses at an early age to cancer.

Moskowitz's accounts of Jewish women who have been silenced, forced to keep ugly secrets, and evade shame in their communities are provocative and disturbing. In one story, she describes the plight of an Orthodox neighbor in the '30s, whose only comfort from a violent and abusive husband is writing plaintive letters to an advice columnist at the Forward's *Bintel Brief*. Her desperate attempts to quell her husband's rages are met with pat advice to keep "a pleasant atmosphere in the home." Here, Moskowitz presents the cruel irony of what it means to keep 'peace in the house,' unveiling women's powerlessness in the domestic sphere and the cost to their dignity and freedom.

In another poignant essay, she describes her quest to relearn her *mameh loshn,* mother tongue. Though Yiddish—especially when spoken in the outside world of the gentile—made her feel ashamed of her Jewishness, the process of relearning the language unleashes her earliest and fondest memories: the conversations of her mother's friends around the kitchen table while the men were at work.

With these stories, Moskowitz redefines her relationship with the traditions and culture so integral to her spirit. She also discovers respect and admiration for the courageous first generation of Jewish women whose struggles as wives and mothers were not so different from her own. These masterfully written tales rove seamlessly between the present day and a fascinating era of Jewish American life. ■

—DEBORAH OSMOND



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SCHOLARS

Commemorating 350 Years of American Jewish History, a scholars conference will meet in Washington, DC, June 6-8, 2004, co-sponsored by the American Jewish Historical Society, the Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, the Library of Congress, the National Archives and Records Administration, and by American University's Jewish Studies Program. Send proposals for sessions with a short biography by October 1, 2003 to *Pamela S. Nadell, nadell@american.edu*

How have gender and ethnicity affected the academic careers of Jewish women? For a collective biography of Jewish women in academia in the mid-twentieth century—*On the Fringes of Academia: Jewish Women as University Faculty*—Harriet Freidenreich of Temple University seeks help in identifying Jewish women professors, researchers or administrators in all fields and in any country, born before 1945—whether or not they are still alive—who might identify themselves as Jews. *hfreiden@temple.edu*

Rosh Chodesh—The Jewish Women;s Educational Conference—co-sponsored by Lilith magazine, the Community Foundation for Jewish Education and the Women's Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago, will be held October 26 at Northwestern University. *DBartonGrant@cfje.org or (847)509-8282 x13*

SCHOLARSHIPS IN ISRAEL

Professor Dafna Izraeli Research Scholarships in Gender Studies have been established in memory of the noted Israeli feminist academician and activist at the Gewurz Center at Bar Ilan University in Ramat Gan, Israel. To learn more or make a donation, e-mail *hillelr@mail.biu.ac.il.*

High school in Israel? The Elite Academy invites Jewish teens aged 15-16 to study for three years (grades 10-12) at any of 60 Israeli high schools and qualify for the Israeli matriculation exam which is internationally recognized for university admission. Full scholarships will cover airfare, tuition, room and board and pocket money. Jewish students from North America, children of Jewish immigrants to North America and Israeli citizens living in North America are eligible. *(212)339-6099; israelcenter@jazo.org.il*

PRAYER AND RITUAL

Ritual Garments for Jewish Women are the subject of two articles in the quarterly publication of the Pomegranate Guild of Judaic Needlework. In the August 2002 issue, Ita Aber describes historic clothing distinctive to Jewish females—for example, the custom of wearing a burial shroud under a bridal dress or being buried in one's bridal clothing. Aber describes garments with fringes that are precedents for modern day Jewish women's wearing of tallitot. In the winter 2003 issue, Millicent Swerdlow tells how to make a tallit that is unique and suited to the personality of the person who will wear it. To receive a copy of these articles send a stamped self-addressed envelope to *Ita Aber, 4465 Douglas Ave, #8G, Bronx, NY 10471-3523.*,

Bat Mitzvah is a rare opportunity for religious creativity, note Jennifer Breger and Lisa Schlaff, editors of *The Orthodox Jewish Woman and Ritual: Options and Opportunities*. Included are reflections of a mother, a bat mitzvah girl, a tutor, sample prayers, and a bibliography. Other pamphlets are *Shabbat* and *On Death and Mourning*; $7.50 each from *The Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance, 15 E. 26th St., #915, New York, NY 10010.*

Pray Tell: *A Hadassah Guide to Jewish Prayer* by Rabbi Jules Harlow includes chapters on "Women's Spiritual Alternatives" by Tamara Cohen; "Orthodox Women's Private Prayers" by Leora Tanenbaum and Vanessa Paloma; "Israeli Poetry as Prayer" by Rochelle Furstenberg, and Rabbi Daniel Gordis on "Prayer as a Response to Evil and Suffering." It also includes excerpts from Susan Weidman Schneider's germinal book, *Jewish and Female*. $29.95 from Jewish Lights Publishing. *www.jewishlights.com*

Towards a More Balanced Wedding Ceremony. Rabbi Dov Linzer discusses opportunities within *halakha* for creating a more egalitarian wedding ceremony, in one of several articles on weddings in the summer 2003 issue of the JOFA Journal, To request a copy call *(212)679-8500* or e-mail *andrea.levin@jofa.org* or *jofa@rcn.com*

Miriam's Cup, fill it up. Artists are invited to send imaginative goblets, glasses, cups, pitchers, chalices and vessels in celebration of Miriam the Prophet for an art competition, exhibition and sale at the Jewish Community Center of Dallas, taking place in February and March 2004. A $30 application and fee is due by October 15 with art to follow. *Judy Cohn, (214)739-2737, ext. 215, jcohn@jccdallas.org*

THEATRE

The Jewish Women's Theatre Project in Los Angeles develops and produces plays and non–traditional theatre events primarily, but not exclusively by Jewish women. The professional, not-for-profit theatre company, founded by Jan Lewis in 1996, features works that challenge stereotypes and explore questions of cultural identity, and will tailor readings to meet requirements of diverse audiences. (An At-Homes New-Play salon series presents theatre in hosting homes followed by dessert and post-play discussions.) Recent playwrights include: Jenna Zark, Barbarah Kahn, Susan Merson and Ronda Spinak. This fall will bring

Jan Lewis

ANNOUNCING LILITH'S SHORT STORY CONTEST

Lilith's 3rd annual prize in Jewish feminist fiction. Wanted: vibrant, compelling and original stories with heart, soul and chutzpah, short stories that illuminate issues central to the lives of contemporary Jewish women. The winning entry will be published in Lilith; the author will receive a $250 honorarium. Manuscripts should be double-spaced, 2500 words or less, previously unpublished. Please include your name and contact information on a separate cover sheet. No manuscripts will be returned. **Deadline: February 1, 2004.** *Lilith Magazine, 250 W. 57th Street, Suite 2432, New York, NY 10107-0172, 1-888-2-LILITH. Lilithmag@aol.com www.lilithmag.com*

a production of "The Left Hand Singing" by Barbara Lebow ("Shayna Maidel"). *(310)398-7117; JWTPSITE@aol.com*

Princess Moxie Rules is an audience-participatory feminist hand puppet musical produced and performed—by invitation—by Jewish educator Jennifer Levine. It features a beautiful princess who does not need rescuing. *Jlevine_tak@hotmail.com*

BODY POLITICS

Save Women's Lives: March for Freedom of Choice marks the first time that major pro-choice organizations have officially collaborated to launch this type of demonstration. **Reproductive rights** are facing unprecedented attacks in Congress, the courts, the states, and the White House (see Think Tank, page 10). Mark your calendars and tell your friends to plan to march on Washington on Sunday, April 25, 2004. Tell Congress and the President that we will not give up our right to reproductive freedom. Many Jewish women's organizations will be marching en masse. If you're a member, march with your group; if you want to connect with other Lilith readers and march with Lilith, let us know: *Lilithmag@aol.com.* The march on Washington will begin at noon starting at the Lincoln Memorial, followed by a rally from 1-4 p.m. on the National Mall.

Please consider a tax-deductible contribution to LILITH, a crucial vehicle of communication and connection for Jewish women. Mail a contribution to Lilith, 250 W. 57th St., #2432, New York, NY 10107; call 888-2-LILITH; or fax 212-757-5705 to contribute by credit card. Thank you.

Holocaust on Your Plate. Roberta Kalechofsky, founder and president of Jews for Animal Rights, vegetarian and animal rights activist has written a protest against the campaign by PETA, (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) which compares animal suffering to the Holocaust. *Animal Suffering and the Holocaust: The Problem with Comparisons. Micah@micahbooks.com*

Mothers balance multiple responsibilities, often alone. "Welfare, Women, and Health: The Role of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families," a report prepared by Jodie Levin-Epstein of the Center for Law and Social Policy for the Kaiser Family Foundation, reflects on lessons learned from recent research on the connection between welfare policies and low-income women's health. *www.kff.org/content/2003/3337*

Bat Shalom, a feminist peace organization working toward a just peace between Israel and its Arab neighbors, has a newly designed website featuring their past and current political statements and photos of their political action campaigns over the years. *www.batshalom.org*

WOMEN TELL

Women's Voices in War Zones. The Women's World Organization for Rights, Literature and Development, or Women's WORLD, a global free speech network of feminist writers, has posted the essays of the winners of its first annual international writing contest. The contest was designed to bring forward voices not being heard in the current discussion of war and terrorism, particularly those of ordinary women trapped in military, political, economic and domestic war zones. *www.wworld.org*

The Daddy-Daughter Chronicles. For an anthology exploring father-daughter relationships, please send pertinent short stories. Published or unpublished, established authors or exceptional new voices are welcome. Submission guidelines: *www.hourglassbooks.com*

OLDER JEWISH WOMEN

The Art of Aging. Aging is a lifelong journey affecting relationships, creativity, memory, continuity, and growth—a process referred to often in Jewish texts. It is interpreted in painting, sculpture, photography, installation, mixed media, and video by contemporary artists from Israel and North America in an exhibit, September 2, 2003 – June 25, 2004 at Hebrew Union College, 1 W. 4th St., New York, NY 10012. **Lilith magazine will host a musical evening as part of the exhibit, featuring Mira Spektor, Leslie Hollis Margulies and others on November 18.** *(212)824-2205; www.huc.edu/museums/ny*

Today I Vote for My Joey is a tragic comedy, a short film written, directed and produced by Aviva Kempner, about the 2000 election results in Palm Beach Florida. It depicts a group of feisty older Jews and a Haitian nurse proudly going

JESSE FELDMAN

to vote for the first Jewish vice presidential candidate. Their day is ruined when they find they mistakenly voted for their nemesis, Pat Buchanan. *(202)362-5760; cieslafdn@aol.com*

To Live Until I Die is a 58-minute film that follows six individuals who face terminal illnesses with humor and insight, anger and honesty and are determined to have what they consider a "good death." *Fanlight Productions; info@fanlight.com*

—*compiled by* NAOMI DANIS

The Dancer

BY RUTH LEVITT

His hands are on the wheel, his foot is on the accelerator, but I am driving the car. Even with his dementia—or perhaps because of it—my husband will not relinquish the car keys. They are the first things in his pocket in the morning and the last things placed on the night table at bedtime. Therefore, although he is unaware of what road we are on, what state we are in or even the day of the week, he is the one who keeps the car moving forward. He knows only that we are heading for California to spend the winter there because he wants to play golf, and in Pennsylvania, where we live, the courses are covered with snow.

As we passed through Oklahoma the weatherman on the radio announced an impending blizzard, and advised all vehicles to get off the road.

"Look how wonderful this is," Herb exclaimed, noticing the highway empty of traffic except for an occasional truck probably rushing to complete a delivery. "We can make great time this way," he chuckled as the windshield wipers clacked frantically to brush away the swirling snow. Meanwhile, the car with its rear wheel drive slid along the road, occasionally skidding sideways but not meeting any obstacles.

"Please, please let's stop!" I cried. "This is so dangerous. We can find motels anywhere along this part of the route." The words echoed in the car but did not register in his irrational mind.

"If we drive past the city limits there won't be any place to stop for a hundred miles," I pleaded. "Oklahoma City is a great area. Let's stay here overnight and see the city hall. The guidebook says there's an oil well on the lawn. Wouldn't you like to see that? Please stop." Snowflakes danced on the windshield. The car kept moving forward.

"I read that the famous ballet artist, Maria Tallchief, came from this area. There are lots of Native Americans around here and there's a big portrait of her in the city hall. Let's stop here and see it tomorrow morning before we leave," I coaxed, hoping he'd remember how much he loved anything to do with dancing. "Anyway, it's getting dark, the road is icy and we have got to get off the highway." Wet white stars silently kissed the glass in front of us. The car kept moving forward.

"One of the great places to eat along Route 40 is in Oklahoma City," I cajoled. "They serve a buffet on the hood of an old-model Cadillac and you sit in car seats at the tables. It's right near a good motel, and we can stay there overnight." Glistening and blanketing the windows the snow fell relentlessly. The car kept moving forward.

I began to get panicky, thinking he might drive all night, into the darkness and—worse—that our luck at avoiding an accident on the icy road might not last much longer.

Suddenly I reached behind the seat, grabbed a blue plastic covered container and held it up so Herb could see it.

"When you have to pee," I said waving the jug in his face, "you use this in an emergency. Well, I have to pee, and I can't use this bottle. You've got to stop so I can go to a bathroom. We'll get off the road at the next exit. Now turn into the exit lane right here!" I demanded. The snow crunched and the car kept moving forward, this time at last leading us off the highway.

We found the motel three blocks from the exit. The restaurant, as advertised, was nearby, just down the street. Surprisingly, even with the inclement weather, there were many cars in the parking lot. While we sat in the lounge, our beverages rested on a table only a foot high, and we drank them through yard-long straws. Then, as he often did whenever he heard music, Herb got up and began to dance—alone, but not for long. A pretty, slim, blonde twentysomething joined him, and they twisted and reeled breathlessly around the room. When the music stopped she threw her arms around him and laughingly exclaimed, "Thank you. You're a terrific dancer. That was such fun." And turning to me she smiled and said, "You're so lucky." ■

"Please stop. This is so dangerous. We can find motels anywhere."

RUTH LEVITT, a public health nurse, has retired to care for her ill husband. She now facilitates an Alzheimer's Support Group.

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